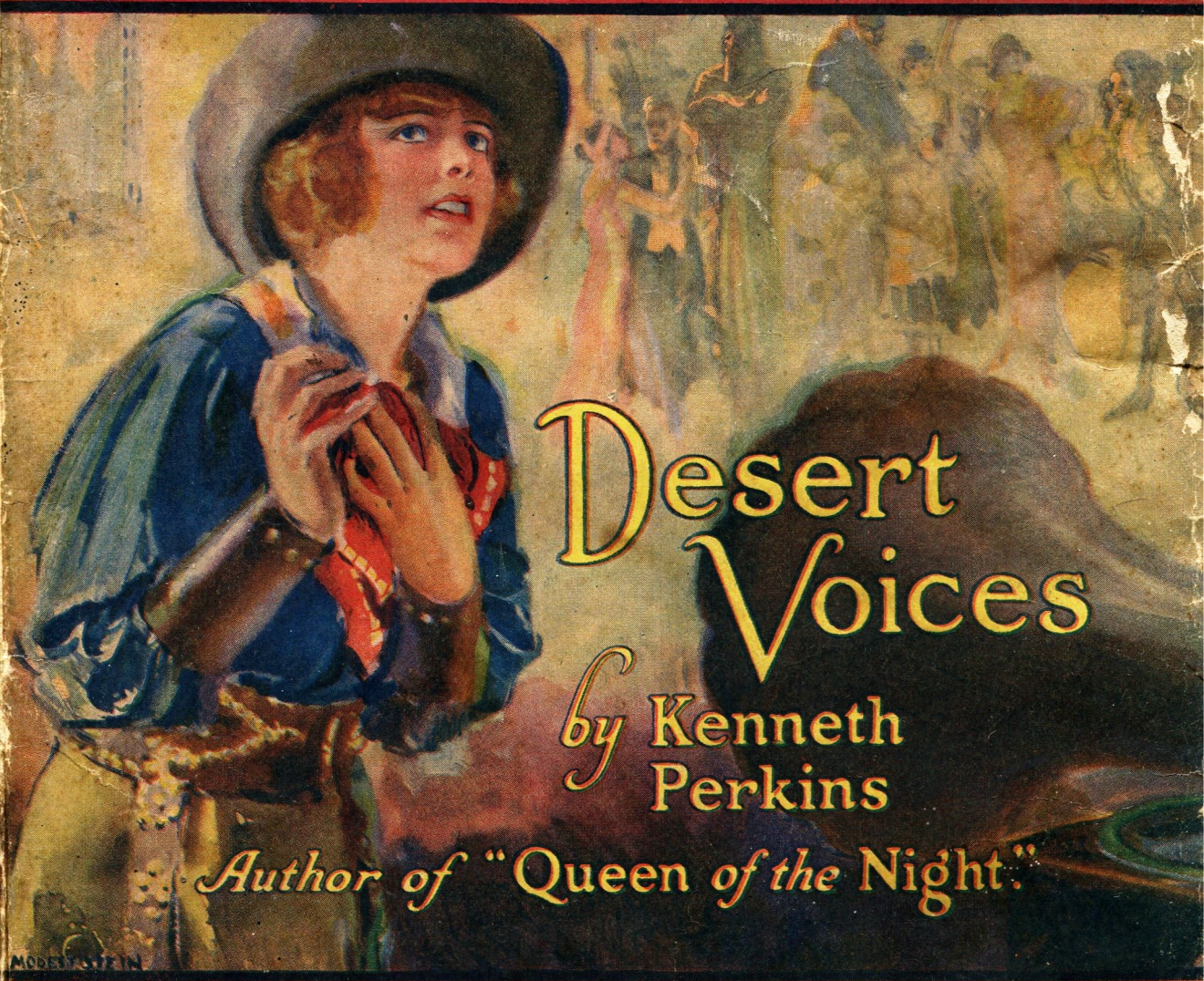
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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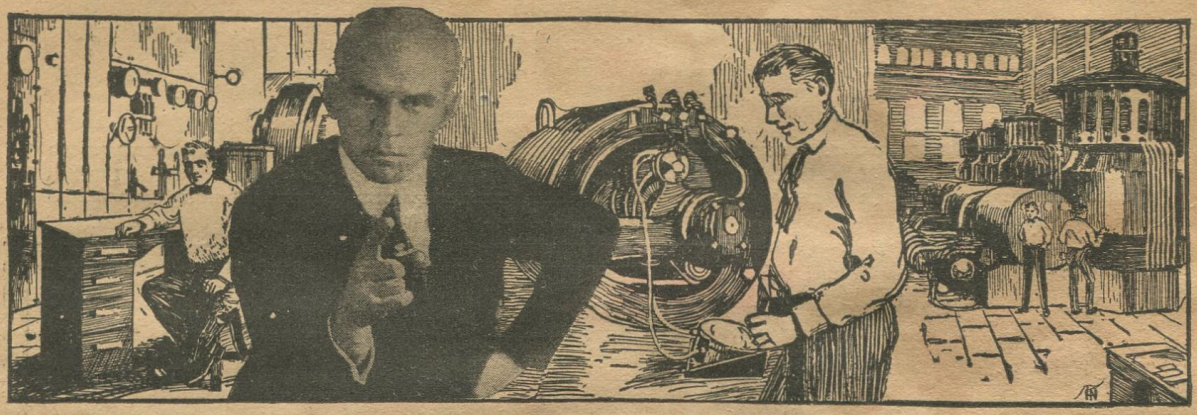

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLIV — CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 6, 1923 — NUMBER 6

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SEMI DUAL RETURNS

J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith, creators of that strange mystic whose eyes read the stars and discern also the truth in the tangles and crimes of humanity, have brought him back to readers of the Argosy-Allstory in a new four-part serial which begins next week

THE OPPOSING VENUS

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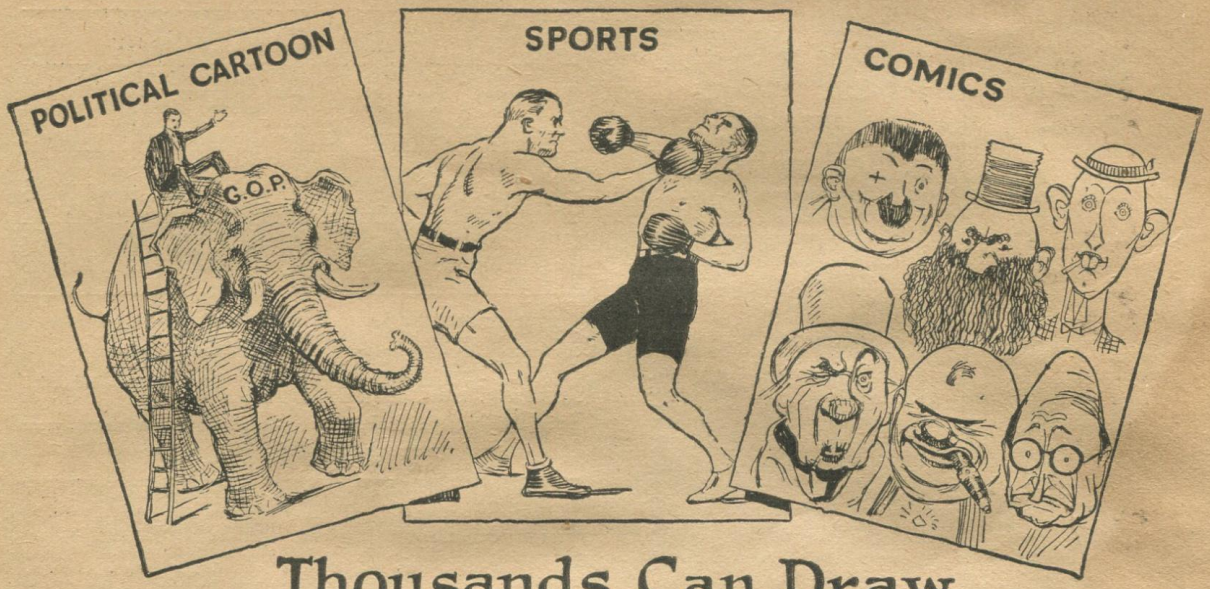

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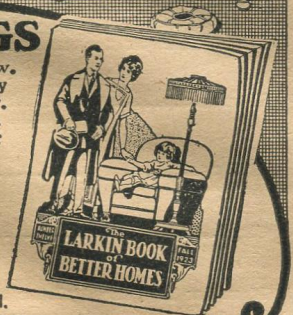

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Let me show you what it means to be filled with energy, initiative, vim and vigor! No man who isn't fit physically and mentally gets half the joy out of life. No one who hasn't the stamina to stay on top of his job ever gets to the top of the heap.

Who are the most popular men you know—the men who get the glad hand everywhere—the men who are getting ahead socially and in a business way? They are the men with health and strength, full of red-blooded enthusiasm and ability, men of personality and pep.

Don't Be a Worthless Weakling

You can't get anywhere worth while if you are only half a man—if you are weak, thin-blooded, anemic—if you are cursed with chronic ailments that make the work of each day just one hard job after another. You can't make a success of anything if fool things you did while a youth have dissipated your vitality. You know it, down in your heart, as well as I do. You know that some day, sooner or later, you will have to do something to pull yourself out of the slough. **Do it NOW.**

Regain Your Vigor and Vitality

I will show you a safe, sure, speedy means of ridding yourself of energy-destroying ailments; of freeing yourself from constipation, dyspepsia, biliousness and other miserable ills; of building yourself up from the beginning—of putting on solid flesh or taking off surplus fat, as the case may be; of strengthening your heart, lungs and other vital organs—in a word, **of recovering the health, strength and vitality you have lost.**

You will never get well unless you make up your mind to look your condition fairly in the face and act. You will get worse, instead of better. You will go slipping and sliding down the easy incline to an irritable, ailment-ridden, useless old age.

Don't fool yourself about it. You can see examples of it on every hand. And don't believe for a minute that patent medicine dope will ever get you out of the hold. **Pills never put pep into a man.**

Come Back to Nature's Ways

There's one head doctor that every physician and surgeon in the world banks on in his practice—and it's old mother Nature. Get rid of the **cause** of the trouble and let her work the cure. That's the modern way. That's the scientific way. That's my way. I have spent my life studying, analyzing and experimenting with the marvelous recuperative, revitalizing, upbuilding forces Nature has implanted in the human organism. I have classified them, arranged them, adapted them to different individuals. I have evolved from them a science which has been of incalculable benefit to weak, ailing, impotent, discouraged humanity in every part of the civilized world.

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Physical and Health Specialist
Dept. 1216, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

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Age.....Occupation.....

Street.....

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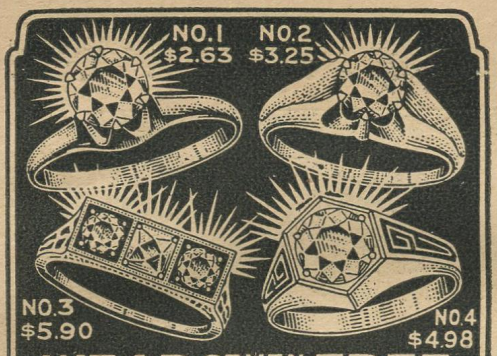

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32x4	7.25	8.25	1.75	36x4½	11.00	12.00	2.75
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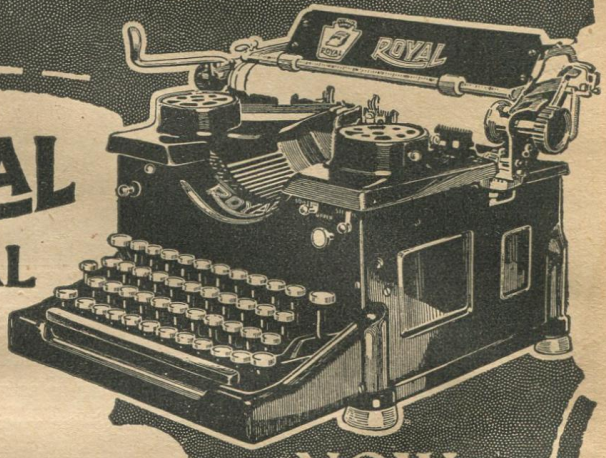

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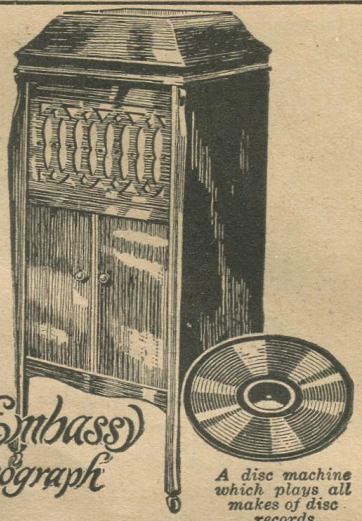

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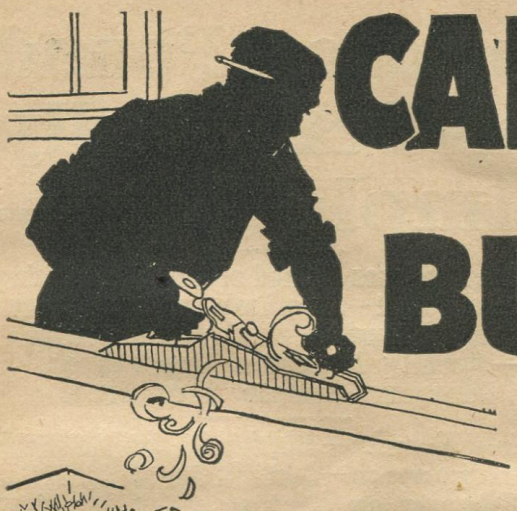

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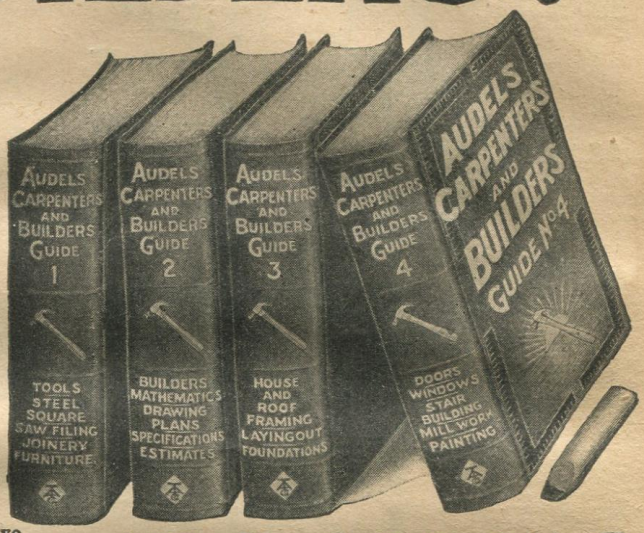

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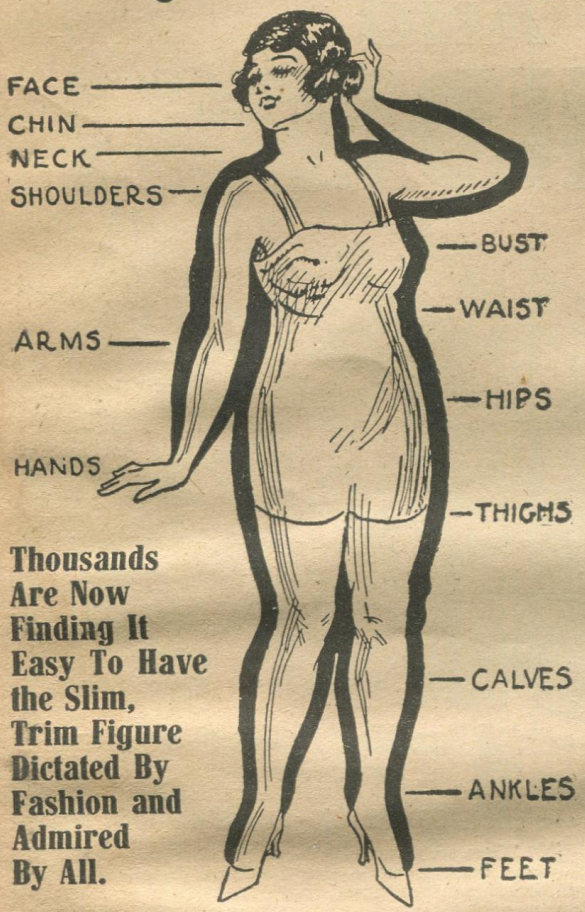

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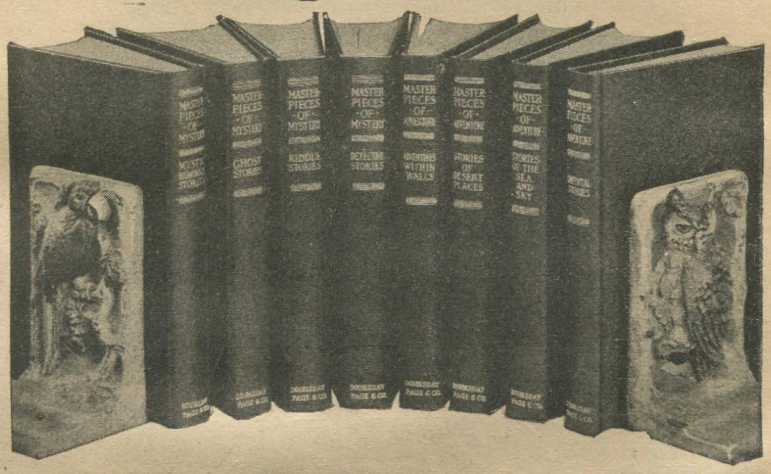

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLIV SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1923 NUMBER 6

Desert Voices

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Queen of the Night," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL UNAFRAID.

FRED HAYDEN was astounded at the transformation of that notorious stage stop which only a few years before had flaunted its glorious aspect of the old and vitally romantic Arizona. The group of unpainted shacks in a scene of mesas, deserts and sparkling thin air still retained the vigorous intense drama of the lost era. It drew for its existence upon the same resources.

Sun-up was in the center of a mining and stock raising country. A stage connected with the Quartzite placer mines, orchards and vineyards; to the north the trading post, Salome, centralized a community of desert cañons and mines—the Harqua Hala gold mine, the Glory Hole of sudden and violent fame. To the south in a country of bleached grass, giant cactus and sage, a few cattle outfits evoked the elemental and vanishing years.

Fred Hayden rattled into town in a runabout. He apologized for the cheap light car; it was the only machine he said which, with the use of chicken wire when stuck in the sand, could traverse the road between Sun-up and the Santa Fe junction.

He observed a semblance of the old days; the unpainted dance halls, the broad, glaring street relieved of a monotone of brown dust by the zigzag red and yellow of a blanket swathing a Pima Indian. There was a pinto at a tethering post, and a loiterer

with fiery burned face and broad lop-brimmed sombrero. But as Hayden chugged past the first saloon he noted that it had been turned into a garage.

The next, the Golden Cloud, a famous gaming house and den of the lost renegade days, was empty, its window panes either broken or completely curtained with brown webs, its doors dammed with sand, its water trough warped and overturned—a half exhumed coffin—its snubbing rail a splintered and fallen grave mark. Adjacent to it the Dead Horse Saloon was used by a cholo as a hot dog stand, garlic replacing the ancient smell of beer sudded bars.

The picturesque shop of Sam Quiggley, harnessmaker, was now blotted with blood-red signs advertising gasoline and motor oils. Sam Quiggley himself had been a part of the old era, man hunter, member of night posses, rider after brand blotchers, assistant at lynchings; occasionally, when drunk and lawless, a barroom gun fighter.

"A representative tragedy!" Hayden remarked to himself. "Sam Quiggley has passed the climax of his life and become very old at fifty."

But the next saloon gave a more poignant illustration of what had happened to old Sun-up. Hayden was oppressed with a feeling of violent destruction, or irreparable loss. Here was a notorious little bar, frequented once by renegades, cholos, Hopis, half-breed herders, and now offering ginger ale and soda. Against the old bullet ridden walls stood bottles of brilliant yellow and pink soft drinks!

Rattling past the poolroom, the office of the Painted Rock and Gila Stage, and the general store, Hayden swerved into the sand rivulets in front of the Doxey Hotel, the only place—aside from a Mexican chow cart and the Dead Horse Saloon—where visitors could dine.

The proprietor recognized Hayden as a drummer who had bothered him five years ago and had mystified the town with the peculiarities of a man from the thickly populated East. In fact, upon Hayden's second entrance into Sun-up the hotel owner noticed that the drummer offered an impressive but disagreeable new assortment of citified manners and conceits.

Fred Hayden was, of course, wind burned, and hence from the point of view of the pale faced tourists on the Santa Fe or Southern Pacific Overlands he would have appeared to belong right where he was: in a small Arizona town. The fine lines about his blue eyes were etched with a whitish dust, making the wrinkles lighter than the burned skin.

In Oklahoma and Arizona, women adjudged him very handsome—if for no other reason than his height and curly auburn hair. His hands, burned but still with a touch of city delicacy, were described by the proprietor of the hotel, and others of a suspicious turn of mind, as the hands of an actor—a mysterious characteristic in Sun-up.

Stepping from his car and stripping off the linen duster—a garment of stylish though ready-made cut—Hayden revealed a tight fitting store suit, the blue of which was enlivened by a broad striping of yellow. A colored shirt—subdued mauve—with cuff links of carbonado diamonds, a blue tie with an unpolished stone of New Mexico turquoise, a turndown detachable collar purporting to be of the same shade as the shirt—all these details stamped Frederick Hayden in the eyes of most towns west of Oklahoma City as a man fashionably arrayed and not overdressed.

His niceties of habit were not confined to haberdashery alone.

"I will be here three days," he remarked to the Mexican woman who waited on the table. "None of your ham and eggs. Pluck three chickens for me—Carmencita—that's your name if I remember rightly—aye? Not fried, either. I'm going to initiate the town of Sun-up in an art which has never been dreamed of between the Sierra Nevadas and the Mississippi River—the gentle art of avoiding the frying pan! Señora Carmencita, remember this, every meal I will have broiled chicken. None of your fresh beef! And as for the coffee—"

As a crowning touch to his exquisite habits, Mr. Fred Hayden extracted a can from his satchel. "I bring my own coffee!"

Carmencita—glum, fat, silent—toddled off to the kitchen—a place buzzing with flies and redolent of Mexican onions.

Hayden turned to the proprietor, Noah Doxey, who had been watching with obvious suspicion this peculiar exhibition of city life. Fred looked up at the glum, sour face; a bent man with thin, colorless hair and venomous little eyes.

"I regret to see, Mr. Doxey," the salesman said pompously, "that the town has passed into a new life. Who is to blame?"

"I am!" Noah Doxey snapped out.

"And you aren't ashamed?"

"Ashamed, hell!" Doxey put his thumbs in his vest. Although not past fifty the backs of his hands shone with that scaly, dry sheen on the skin of very old men. "I'm proud. I'm prouder of what I've been able to do in keeping peace in this country than of anything else in my life. As you know, I own practically this whole town. In a manner of speaking it's like I was its keeper."

"You own the town, Mr. Doxey, but do you own the minds of its citizens? Can you own the thoughts of these stock men here who used to be renegades, gunmen, gamblers? I might suggest, respectfully of course, that you can't own what they think."

Mr. Doxey, biting off the end of his toothpick and spitting thoughtfully, remarked: "I ain't so sure."

Hayden fell to carving his broiled chicken, a duty which he performed with much ceremony.

"Look here," Noah Doxey went on. "You remember Sun-up five years ago. I take it that was the first time you was here—selling freckle lotions to the dance gals at the Golden Cloud Saloon?"

"I remember it well," Hayden said. "Arizona could boast of something then. Can I forget Six-Gun Patterson? Can I forget the kick of jackass brandy? Can I forget Frisco Lou? Those were blossoms in the desert!"

"Fire and brimstone you mean!" Doxey shot back. "And you can thank me for corralling all them thieves, hussies and gunmen and shippin' 'em out of the country! Blossoms, aye! Fire and brimstone!"

"Fire and brimstone have their merits. Volcanoes are responsible for a good deal of Arizona's superb scenery. What you have done, Mr. Doxey, in suppressing this town is like putting a cement dam—like the one up at Salt River—on a volcano!"

Fred Hayden was evidently pleased with his elaborate but somewhat inaccurate figure of speech. He raised his voice: "But you can't keep it corked up. No man can put a lid on a crater!"

"They can't, eh?" little Noah Doxey laughed, rubbing his chin with his thick turtle-shell thumbnail. "Well that's what I done!"

"Well and good," Hayden agreed. "Now get my point: I've read that when a volcano is pent up, it's worse than one that smokes. All the heat and fire and energy gather fury and suddenly, bingo! the place blows up; a town's wiped out, human beings are scattered to bits, the earth shakes for miles around. You've pent up the desires—the steam—that simmered off in those old barroom nights.

"Do you think the desires are gone now? They're gathering. In the old days the hates didn't last. There was a little love affair, a little jealousy, a game of cards, a knife, a gunshot or two, and the town drifted along free and easy. You don't understand, Mr. Doxey, what power there is in a hate that lasts—in a desire to kill that's suppressed, or for that matter—in a passionate love!"

"It's law and order anyways, Mr. Drummer."

"I grant you that. As the most active political figure in this county, Mr. Doxey, you are to be congratulated. But when this town has a match touched to it there'll be an explosion that 'll be heard as far as Phoenix and Tucson. What the match will be I don't know.

"Maybe the town will wake up to its rights and go on a spree. Wow! That would be some sight! An orgy! Rome! A bacchanal! With old Sam Quiggley shooting again—and Doc Winkler drunk—and—"

"It 'll never be so long as I'm here. There'll be no drinkin' in this county! I've got the law—the marshal and the sheriff on my side now. This town stays peaceable!"

"Maybe it won't be drink."

"What else can it be?"

"With a bunch of characters such as I find upon riding into this burg, a riot can

be started by things other than wine. There are—as the old saying goes—women and song, you know."

The Doxey House was ordinarily a scene where such a conversation could go uninterrupted for hours by any sound—other than the occasional neighing of a horse or the putter of hoofs as a rancher rode by, or perhaps the rattle of a buggy or a cheap car. Even the arrival of the automobile stage from the south over the route which many years before had included Sun-up as one of the stage-stops did not awaken the town.

But on this occasion, before Hayden had finished his chicken dinner and his special cup of coffee, the conversation was brought to an abrupt end. The Painted Rock and Gilda Stage discharged a passenger—a woman.

The proprietor turning from Hayden's table, looked at the newcomer with a thrill of misgiving—as well as of vital interest.

Noah Doxey, who hated women with considerably more venom than he hated men, observed that the new guest, dressed in sombrero, faded jersey suit and laced high boots, and carrying a ragged valise, was a girl of the challenging attractiveness of the many that Doxey had driven out of Sun-up in its palmiest and wickedest days.

She resolutely passed the gamut of the sidewalk; a group that wanted to see what the stage had brought from the desert. She returned the stare of the drummer and old Doxey with an audacious challenge—with unfathomable eyes.

"Yep! I know her kind—" Doxey muttered wisely.

"Wait!" Hayden whispered with evident excitement. "Do you think you've got her number? Look how she walks up to that desk! Look at the way she holds her head! Look at that red mouth! Did you ever see the old dance hall girls walk into a hotel like that? No sir! They were always afraid! This girl looks as if she owned the place! And everyone in it!"

The girl looked at the group of men and a slow, dimpled smile lit her features. The light of it was reflected on the face of every man there — Sam Quiggley, the harness-maker, the drummer, the stage driver.

"A wicked smile—" said Doxey.

"Hold on now!" Hayden objected. "Look closer! She's beautiful!"

"Yes, her lashes are beaded like the dance gals we've ousted from the town!"

Hayden stared. "I'll be damned if they are!"

"Anyway they're the sinfullest eyes I ever seen!"

"Superb!"

"If it ain't paint, then she was born with a wicked face!" was Doxey's final and irrevocable judgment.

CHAPTER II.

KNIGHTHOOD FLOWERS SUDDENLY.

AS the girl registered under the supervision of Jen Parker—a squat sun-faded woman who acted as the day clerk—the proprietor from the seclusion of the dining room suspiciously studied his new guest.

Without taking his eyes from her he muttered to the drummer from the corner of sagging lips: "Speaking of the old days of Sun-up and this here part of Arizona, that's the kind of gals we used to have in town. Did you ever see a wickeder face?"

Fred Hayden, without staring blankly in Doxey's manner, made his own surreptitious appraisal: "I don't know, Mr. Doxey, as I could make an offhand estimate concerning this lady's character. Her eyes are remarkable. Of course, it might be paint on her eyelids, but then if we could inspect her more closely—"

"I know the gal!" Noah Doxey snapped conclusively. "She's from the Seven C's Ranch across the desert—the Crockett's outfit. Did you ever hear tell of Dan Crockett?"

"You mean the gambler? Never saw him. But I've heard of him. Every one's heard of him in the county. A handsome brute from Alabama—singer; all the women crazy about him; picturesque renegade of the old type."

"Damned if you don't call everything that comes out of hell's fire picturesque!" the little proprietor grunted in exasperation. "He was a devil, that's all! And he sang negro songs, played on the banjo, mando-

lin, cornet—anything you gave him—it made no difference so long as he could work men or women into a passion. And a gambler, too, who busted men—"

"Absolutely straight—though," Hayden put in reminiscently.

"What difference does it make if a gambler's straight or crooked? He ruined men—"

"And himself—"

"All right! That's all the worse! He represented what you—what sentimental citified poets call the spirit of the frontier days. Drank like a hog—"

"But was never drunk. I've heard that, too."

This also was a distinction Noah Doxey would not recognize.

"He was a man—a master, if you want to call it—of sin, passion, of the ways of hell's fire."

"The last of a great race," Hayden commented with the same exuberance.

Doxey did not heed the interruption. "And it was me who drove him out of town. Yes—the last of that race of heathens—of thieves, gamblers, gunmen! Since his time and his influence is gone the town is a town of peace."

The nasal screech from the vestibule—the voice of Jen Parker—cut into Doxey's tirade.

"This here gal wants for to talk to you, Mr. Doxey," the clerk called out. "It's Hallie Crockett."

"Crockett?" Hayden raised his eyebrows with a look of sudden enlightenment.

"Yes! It's his daughter—Dan Crockett's," the proprietor said. "Dan Crockett, the gambler, the devil I chased out of town. Speaking of the devil—here comes his daughter!"

Noah Doxey stepped into the vestibule with a feeling of self-elation common to business men when pretty girls ask for employment. But here, meeting the full, bright gaze of the girl, he shrank, his head settling into a large celluloid collar. He realized he was ugly and that she—whether devil or angel—was a beautiful creature.

He squinted directly at every feature of her face; the huge gray eyes, the smiling damask lips, the curl of silken hair about a slightly tanned forehead. In the dining room which opened wide upon the vestibule, Fred Hayden sipped his special brand of coffee and took small puffs from a fancy cigarette, deliberately assaying the fragrance of each sip and each puff. As yet he showed no interest in Noah Doxey and his visitor.

"Now then set down here by the window!" the old man ordered.

The girl obeyed, seating herself in the wicker sofa and leaning forward. Doxey hunched himself in the brightly varnished "golden oak" armchair, with a convenient and resplendent brass spittoon at his heel.

Through the plate glass window Sun-up looked on; the stage driver pretending to be busy with a tire, a stocktender just in town from his range, a squaw and cholo, a youth from the telegraph office. They could not hear the conversation, but they could see Hallie's lips—which sufficed.

"Now, miss, if you want to see me about getting a job in this town," Doxey said, "I want to know something about you."

"I'm Hallie Crockett—my father, before he died, was known up here. He knew you."

"Yes, I knew your father, gal," he said. "A very popular fellow. A Dixie gent—as they call 'em back in Texas. I don't know rightly what we call 'em here in Arizona." Further than this Noah Doxey, with the necessary respect for the dead, passed no judgment.

"He was a great man, our hands say down at the range," the girl announced proudly. "Ma and I are just ordinary ranch folks." She bloomed out into a smile again—the kind the onlookers were waiting for—the kind Noah Doxey said was of the devil. "But when ma used to tan me with a quirt down in the stables, she said I inherited a powerful lot of my dad's character traits!"

"I reckon you look like him," Doxey said. He did not know how to pay a compliment to a woman, but he was thinking definitely that the girl's face was a beautified copy of the face of the devil, her father.

"My ma said I was to ask you to give me a job."

"Why?"

"We need money. The ranch won't pay us anything till spring."

"I mean, why did she tell you to come to me?"

"She said you owned the town."

This touched a responsive chord. Doxey stopped to think a moment just what could be done with a pretty girl in the town he had remade.

In the old days it would have been a simple matter. Overholser or Farraday or some of the other saloon men would have given her a spangled dress, a pair of silk stockings, gilt slippers, and put her in the dance hall. But there were no more dance halls.

Furthermore, in the moment's pause of the conversation Doxey caught sight of the faces of the loiterers in the hotel. Under the brims of sombreros he could see a glimmer of light—a sort of light which had long since gone out in the town of Sun-up. He recalled what the drummer had said; there was needed only one little match and the whole place would blow up.

"I can't give you a job, gal," he said in a nasal whine.

"I thought maybe I could wait on the table here at your hotel. My ma says—"

"I have all the help I can use. I've always been careful with my money. It's scarce since the old boom days."

"How about taking care of the rooms?"

"You need money bad, don't you? That work is given to cholos in this here town. You better go home to your maw."

"I might find a job at a chow stand. I could make friends with the town. I could gather a regular patronage—"

"I admit that. Fact is, you'd gather one in a hurry. First thing I'd know there'd be a gang—like the old gangs that used to ride the country. The young herders would get together again. The kind of fellows who won't submit to a country being owned by nobody. My reign of peace and prosperity—as some like to call it—would bust."

"I can't understand all that. It seems you're afraid of me. Of me—just coming in from a range-fed cow outfit. It's funny." The girl studied him. There was no animosity or even impatience. But a twinkle of lights seemed to cross her face. "It *is* funny. I believe you could give me work somewhere—if you wanted to."

"You better go back to the mesas where your maw lives," Doxey said conclusively.

The girl waited. She had no intention of begging for a job. She assumed indifference by whistling a wornout song used by her mother's cowmen in night herding.

Doxey, in lieu of occupying himself with tobacco which he never used, took out another toothpick and chewed it. The conversation still at a deadlock, he arose, stepped to the registry desk where, from a dust-covered glass urn, he took a package of chewing gum. He ruminated.

The girl gave up waiting. "You don't mind if I eat here?" she asked finally.

"Not at all. I was goin' to suggest it. Just finished myself, or I'd ask you to dinner. We have what is called a regular dinner here: fried ham, eggs, fine coffee, too. I'm mighty pleased to have you." Then he added, considering that his invitation might be taken too literally: "Best price anywhere in the county, too."

It was while seated at a table, virtually facing the dapper Frederick Hayden that Hallie noticed the connoisseur from Kansas City. He found that it was an easy meeting to arrange. The girl was as anxious for company as he.

"I heard all about it, lady, all about it!" he said. "And I'm here to tell you that old Doxey turning you down as he did means nothing—except, naturally, that he's an ass. You're hunting for work; that settles it. From the point of view of a business man—a city business man—you're a very promising looking candidate!"

Hallie forgot the admonition of her mother, to the effect that men with collars on must be spoken to with reserve.

"Well, this is lucky!" she said joyfully. "We must have met somewhere before. My name's Hallie Crockett, and yours?"

This surprisingly easy meeting with a girl from the unfenced range country threw Hayden slightly off his guard.

"No, we haven't met before, I must confess," he said; then, regaining his buoyancy: "I merely noted that you were in distress—as the saying goes. A beautiful woman; I imagine myself a knight. It is

my meat and drink to champion a just cause. Let me introduce myself: Hayden's my name—Frederick Hayden, representing the Kansas City Silo, Vat, and Farm Building Corporation.

"No! I know you don't want to buy anything for your ranch. It isn't a matter of business this little conversation of ours. And yet, in a manner of speaking, it is!"

"Business?" Hallie asked with wide open eyes. "No, you must be mistaken. I am just a girl from the Seven C's outfit. You're a man from the East—a man from the city."

"You are looking for a job—that's a matter of business right there. You immediately cease to be a farmer's daughter and become a business woman. I might say the moment that idea gets into your head you become a financier!

"Oh, I know old Doxey, the skinflint and reformer, says there's no chance for you in this town. But when he says that, he merely turns you over to me—or rather the Fates and Destinies and Sisters Three turn you over to me!

"The fact is, my girl, this is the luckiest hour of your life. By the merest coincidence it happens that I came to town scarcely half an hour before you! It's an act of Providence.

"This is the kind of hour which palmists tell us of—the kind of an hour which makes a red mark on a horoscope or a line in the palm of your hand. It's an hour which astrologers can read in the stars!"

"That's some language you're speaking," the girl remarked.

The fat Mexican waitress waddled into the room—huge of stomach—a cotton bag of red with black polka dots and a pattern of grease. She slid a heavy white bowl of watery soup on the table before Hallie.

The girl reached hungrily for a spoon. But Hayden put up his hand with a gesture eloquent of command, disgust and exasperation.

"Take it away!" he cried. "Take away that mess of greasy pottage! I myself shall order this dinner. None of your fried table d'hôte for this lady! Husks for the swine to eat! Whereas, here we have a lady of the Western ranges!

"A broiler done to a turn, instead. Let her have one of those chickens I ordered. And put on a pot of *my* coffee; drop in an egg shell, bring it to a boil till the crust breaks!" He turned to Hallie: "If you will be so gracious as to accept my hospitality!"

Hallie Crockett gaped in surprise. Her mother back on the ranch had not given any directions how to act in cases of this sort. She had thought at first that the man was suspiciously friendly and a little audacious, but if he was actually inviting her—a stranger—to dinner, it surely meant that he was a gentleman.

"Don't refuse!" Fred Hayden said peremptorily. "*That* you cannot do under any circumstances."

"Well, say, mister, if you don't take my breath away!" Hallie exclaimed.

"Good! The lady accepts!" Hayden announced, turning to the waitress. "A broiler!"

The Mexican woman having studied the strange girl from the peak of her dusty sombrero down to the little boots, came to some very definite conclusions.

"Now, then—"

"I must say, mister, you're very kind."

"Not at all. You are probably laboring under a delusion. When a little girl like you, fresh, as one might say, from the wind-swept mesas comes to town, you must remember that in the hearts of all men here there burns a vital—an age-old desire to take off our cloaks and spread them upon the mud so that your little feet will not be smirched!" Here he swung his arm as if unfolding an imaginary cloak upon the board floor.

"My goodness!" Hallie Crockett cried in the accents of a delighted boy. "This is certainly a piece of luck!"

CHAPTER III.

MINUS THE WINE.

AS Hallie Crockett was eating the dinner her newly found acquaintance had ordered for her, the latter began to outline for her what he had termed his "business proposition."

"I suppose you happen to know of the old Golden Cloud gaming house? And who doesn't know of it in the county or the history of the State."

"It's where my father worked and got enough money to buy a ranch," Hallie replied readily. "I ought to know something about it."

"Exactly. Well, your dad wouldn't recognize the place now, I'll tell you that! I understand a hot dog vender bought it—or else won it in a poker game—and thought he'd make a restaurant out of it. But the place kept filling up with sand and the owner found it paid better to sell his hot dogs in a chow cart where there aren't so many window panes required.

"Now here's the idea: that place was the life of the town a generation ago, and the life of the place itself was your dad. You get my point? Have you a sense of the dramatic—of the elements of tragedy, retribution, triumph and all the other forces which this town—thanks to the damnable reformer, Noah Doxey—has forgotten?"

"You're using pretty big words, mister," the girl replied.

"All right. I'll explain: The old gambling den was the center of the glory that was Arizona and the grandeur that was Yuma County! Some people who are wanting in the poetic sense of values, which I might say is one of my peculiar hobbies—such people might have termed the Golden Cloud gambling house a den of iniquity, gun shooting and crime."

"Not if my dad worked there—"

"Thank God for your vision, little lady. You have already grasped the meaning that words cannot make clear. Suffice it to say, that I visualize the old den up on Slag Street as a palace of fortune, of combat, yes, glorious man-to-man combat, of the shouting of oaths, of the drinking of strong drink, of the staking of gold mines—and of lives! It was, in fact, a place of supreme glory! Am I right?"

"You are!"

"Good! Well, that's what it's going to be again. *You* are going to come back—wearing the mantle of your father—Dan Crockett!"

"You mean—"

"I'm going to open up the old Golden Cloud and employ you as the chief attraction."

"But look here, mister, if you want to start a den with gun shooting and all that, you're on the wrong track. You're out of your head! I've seen a bit of gun shooting and know enough to hide when Indians who've been getting religious over 'mad apple' start knifing each other.

"Besides, you can't have liquor in this town, they tell me. And what's left? Gambling? My ma says the deck of cards is what kept us from becoming cattle kings!"

"You have caught the spirit of my idea!" Hayden exclaimed. "And I might say your imagination has carried you far beyond what I had at first pictured! I believe, since you insist, gun shooting might be dispensed with—and liquor as well—provided we find it absolutely necessary to do without it. Ginger ale has its effects when the spirit is willing!

"And concerning the card deck, there are, as the saying goes, games—and games! Instead of calling a spade a spade we might call it something else; for instance, monte and ombre can be replaced by solo and poker, or if the county authorities are too pressing—by pool and billiards. The actual game, understand me, is, if I speak plainly, neither here nor there."

The girl could not admit conscientiously that he was speaking plainly. But she did understand in an indefinite sort of way that this well dressed business man was talking of matters of far-sighted civic improvement. If her father had worked at the Golden Cloud, it was a good enough background for her.

"I want to see the place again," she said. "The last time my ma brought me up to this town I was a little freckled kid in pigtails."

"Step into my car," Mr. Hayden said ceremoniously.

On the outskirts of the town was a huge structure of warped lumber, bleached to light gray by sun, wind and sand. That part of the roof which in the usual manner of the old-time dance halls and saloons extended over the sidewalk, had caved in, and

the twenty-foot uprights that once had served as the support for this roof, as well as tethering posts for the saddle horses, were fallen and buried in sand drifts. The name of the saloon—Golden Cloud—was still visible, lettered against a background of scaly and blistered red.

But the interior, thanks to the dry Arizona air, gave little evidence of decay. The climate that enables adobe missions—mere edifices of mud—to stand for a century or two and the templelike formations of the Grand Cañon to retain their exquisite façades—had scarcely mellowed the rawness of the Golden Cloud's unpainted boards. The bar was smeared slightly with cobwebs, flies had specked the signs on the wall which stipulated the price of jackass brandy as well as the management's desire that dancing girls were not only to be seen, but to be treated.

Initials and names carved in the tables, the bar and the rudely planed uprights might have been the marks of dance girls or two-gun men still in the prime of their careers. Where knives had cut these names in the fresh hewn lumber the resin, now dry and powdery, still marked the ancient wounds.

One particular sign, with streaks of rust from the nails which held it up, caught Hallie Crockett's eyes. It was a placard evoking the whole picturesque career of her father:

> Dan Crockett. His Alabama Band. No Vibrating after Sunrise.

"There we are!" Fred Hayden exclaimed, removing his derby and standing rapturously before this shrine. "The very name! The very dais upon which he played! And the scene! Picture it; a smoke-befogged place, and all about rugged heroic men defiant of death, ready at any moment to be sent into eternity at the smile of a woman, at the challenge of a man, the passionate touching of a trigger.

"Glorious! Gambling away gold mines! Dancing to Dixie songs—to the clink of spurs, to the rhythm of great oaths and smashing fists and blasting guns! Mortal life was nothing in their eyes—they were like gods, and the smoke-tinged red by that old locomotive headlight up there was like a cloud on Olympus tinged by old Aurora herself!

"And, in the midst of this scene, picture your father, handsome, devil-may-care hero that he was, with all the women crazy about him, and the men treating him with cigars or a split of champagne or a slug of gin, and the gamblers inviting him to sit in on their game—and your father breaking the bank and then treating the whole house for the rest of the night!"

Hallie's eyes glowed, and she looked about as intently, with as rapt a gaze as if she saw the ghosts of all those frontier characters assembled again, and heard the jingle of spur chains, the shuffle of cowboy boots, the yipping of miners drunk with their riches, the tinkle of glasses, the dry rattle of poker chips and dice. Hayden watched her face and saw the vision fade, and her expression break into a winsome smile.

"Those days are gone," she said sadly.

"You are going to bring them back. You're the only one in the county who could do it. Your father typified that glorious spirit of abandon. It's immortal. It is here again in you! When I look into your face I can see a flicker of lights—like these night mirages you have in the Gold Poke Desert."

"There can't be any more of that gun-shooting. There oughtn't to be. And the law's shut down on the liquor. What's left?"

"The heart of it's left!" Hayden cried dramatically. "The hates, the vengeance, the avarice, the love, the heroism—it's all in this town just as it was then. Do you suppose a man like Noah Doxey, backed by a few laws, could wipe out those eternal passions? They're here! They're pent up and simmering in every Arizona town now as it was then!"

"But how can I bring those days back?"

"Look here!" Hayden pointed to the warped old bar. "I'm going to turn that place into a tamale stand. We'll have a Mex' sell tamales, enchiladas, hot dogs. Nothing crazy about that. Every town in Arizona has already transformed its old bars just that way.

"Then right here, where the old wheel was, we'll put a pool table. And over here—I believe this is where the mechanical piano stood—and I hear Doxey's taken it up to the Baptist church. Here's where you can put a few marble-top tables for soda and ice cream. *You* can supervise that part of it.

"In plain terms, I'm going to set you up in business—and as I said when I first met you, it's going to be a pure business proposition. I'm not taking all the money and paying you a salary—we're going fifty-fifty. I can see money in it—big money.

"I'm naturally a business man, and I think in terms of big money—none of this chow cart stuff! We're going to open up a community center, as you might say."

"It sounds good."

"You're on, then?"

There was no hesitation on the part of Hallie. There was no possible argument, because they had the right on their side. Dan Crockett would vouch for it! Hallie considered the whole proposition a piece of extraordinary luck—the kind of luck her father was known to have when the wheel was running in the old days.

"Of course I'm on," she replied.

"Well, then, there remains but one thing more," Hayden announced. He stepped out to his little car, and a moment later returned with a curious-looking suit case, black with brass corners.

"A little side line of mine," he said; "a great success among the farmers of the Kansas prairies. In this satchel I have the key, not only to the past—to the scenes which once made this gaming den the glory of Arizona; but it is a key to all the romance of the world—to all the voices, from the smallest to the greatest, from the ugliest to the most beautiful!

"With the instrument I have in this satchel you can enchant the hearts of all the men in Sun-up as the pied piper of Hamelin drew about him a whole city of children. You can work upon them as Orpheus, playing his lute, worked upon the hearts of the beasts of the forest; you can calm the savage within the breasts of these rugged frontiersmen as David calmed the brutish soul of King Saul. To be brief, I will say that in this suit case I have a certain merchandise which Orsino called the 'food of love'!"

He opened the lock and threw back the leather cover with a flourish.

"Why, it's only a phonograph!" the girl cried.

"Yes—only a little tin phonograph with a horn! That's all this box contains. But what a wretched way of phrasing it: only a phonograph!

"What does this little sombrero you are wearing, and this little frock, and those little high-laced boots—what does this outfit contain? Only a woman!

"And this broken bottle underneath the bar rail? What did it contain? Only wine!

"And what does this satchel contain? Only song!

"All the laws of the world cannot prevail against these three—no, nor against any two of them. And we've got the two most important—woman and song! It is all that is needed to set the town of Sun-up burning!"

"Well, look here, mister!" the girl laughed. "I must say old Mr. Doxey was pretty wise when he refused to give me a job. When my ma said Sun-up was a quiet place, and that I'd be safe, I guess she didn't figure I was elected to set the town on fire!"

"Well, I take that as a verbal contract."

"Here's my hand."

As they shook hands the bleached, dried-up house reëchoed with the lush voices of four negroes. The phonograph was offering a tantalizing mixture of coon-shouting and close harmony:

"They have taken her to Georgia for to wear
her life away,
As she toils in the cotton and the cane!"

Both listened—an innate rapture pervading the girl, awakening her just as the harmony awoke the dead echoes of that old den.

"One night I went to see her, but 'She's
gone,' the neighbors say,
The white man's bound her with his chain!"

"A simple and heartrending ditty," Fred Hayden commented. "But wait. Shed no

tears until you have heard the real music stored in this old box. Melba will sing in this desert! The Valkyries will ride on the winds that whirl down from the Granite Wash. There will be a 'Spring Song' heard when the palo verde blossoms and the Papagos burn their palo santo incense.

"All the voices of the world will sing in this dry skeleton of a house! They will clothe it with its old glory. They will resurrect it. It will live. It will be a temple!"

Hallie was too enchanted with the harmony of the negroes to reply.

"I'm a-comin', comin', comin', as the angels cleah the way!
Farewell to that ole Kentucky shore!"

CHAPTER IV.

KEEP YOUR JAWS TOGETHER!

TWENTY miles from Sun-up was the Seven C's outfit, irrigated by a creek which on the United States Geological Survey maps was represented by an indefinite dotted line disappearing into a desert. In this country of thin, sparkling air, fragrant with pronged cactus, productive of scrub cattle, copper and gold, was situated the rundown ranch which Dan Crockett, vagabond and gentleman, had left to his widow and daughter.

While Hallie Crockett was starting in on her career in Sun-up with a blithesome and childlike conviction that she could recoup the niggard fortunes of her mother, the latter remained on the cattle farm.

The Widow Crockett was a brown, gnarled little woman, with eyes in which there was a peculiar smoldering fire. There was nothing about her person—her hands like twisted roots, her wrinkled face from which all expression had been blasted by the Arizona sun, the brown gingham skirt and alpaca jacket, the napatan boots turned up at the toes and many times resoled—nothing to set her apart from the ordinary desert ranch wife. Except those eyes.

There was a vivid imagination there—something that saw beyond the red Harcuvar mesas to the north or the yellow tables of the Granite Wash to the south. The Widow Crockett's imagination was, in short, far more powerful than the dried up little body broken by ranch toil.

It liberated her from that body. While she was doing the work, preparing the meals for her small retinue of ranch hands, superintending the cleaning of the bunk houses, the branding of calves, the cutting out of the beef critters from her small herd, she imagined herself in another life.

She imagined herself rich with her many years of toil—suddenly rich—with the triumph of the Comanches who had discovered oil, with the abandon of pocket hunters who had struck a fortune in copper, of muckers who had found gold.

Rich, riding in a carriage, or better, a high powered car that had no alkali powdered over its hood or misting its glass windows! Living in a house on Slag Street opposite to the saloon where her husband had gambled away his money!

Despite year after year of cattle plague, the dwindling remuda of cow horses, the blizzard, the bandits, the Widow Crockett dreamed that when the heel-flies came again and the spring round-up was finished, the debts of the winter paid with the money Hallie promised to send from town, prosperity would come.

And others—her foreman, Phil Wyndham, a cattle buyer, a veterinary from Bouse—encouraged her dreams. If that winter brought no more unforseen tragedy, the ranch would pay. The cattle were healthy; they would, it must be admitted, cut up to patchy meat, but there would be a good sum of money.

The fall round-up would bring more. The following year—provided a dozen fortuitous circumstances came to pass—the Widow Crockett might taste that long dreamed of thing—luxury.

But one of the very men who pointed out the innate possibilities of Widow Crockett's beef herd—the veterinary—also was the bearer of another sort of tidings. Old Doc Winkler, called in to diagnose an illness with which the widow was stricken, announced in his frank, almost brutal, sort of way, that she had better call a regular doctor and likewise send to Sun-up for her

daughter. The malady, he affirmed, was beyond his administering.

"But will we—she and I—see the spring together?" the woman asked in a dull, matter-of-fact voice, that belied the yearning fire of her eyes.

Old Winkler was about to say that the daughter would see the ocotillo bloom, but that the mother would not. A touch of sentimentality complicated his loud, harsh tones, however, and he said: "We'll hope so, ma'am. That thar's a promisin' bunch of beef critters you-all got, ma'am, if I know a thing or two. Of course, you got to watch out for the murrain. It 'll cut a herd to pieces worse'n a gang of Mex rustlers."

"Yes, it 'll be a good round-up," the woman said.

She did not send for her daughter immediately. She had news that the girl was starting to make money at the very peculiar occupation of selling phonograph records. It was best that she—the widow—let things go for a while.

Then came a certain afternoon when she lay in her bed watching through the screened window the quiet, almost forsaken, corrals. There were visible, the outlaw, useless horse; a mozo content to remain with the outfit as long as alkali whisky drugged his ambition; and a third figure, the faithful Phil Wyndham.

He was a medium sized youth with a serious and stolid face which at times broke into a boyish grin. He wore a lop-brimmed sombrero so large as to make him resemble a mushroom. A beaded vest, black flannel shirt, leather cuffs studded with brass, a pair of baggy cord trousers tucked into oiled boots, failed to differentiate him from the usual ranch hand, auto stage driver or baggage man one might see hanging about any Santa Fe station.

At the present moment he was engaged, as the Widow Crockett observed with a winsome smile, in attempting to break the outlaw cayuse. This feat he consistently attempted whenever, after using up the saddle horses, he needed a fresh mount for night herding.

Thus far, the Widow Crockett recalled, he had been thrown every time in almost the precise spot—a patch of rattleweed in the south corner of the corral. So certain was she of the landing place that she ordered one of her mozos to cover it with straw the next time Wyndham indulged his weakness for bronc peeling.

But now as she saw the mozo carrying an armful of straw from the barn she realized that it was the last time she would ever witness the slick heel and high diving contest of Phil Wyndham *versus* Cactus Anne. Skeptical as she had always been before—and if the truth must be told, rather proud of the buck jumping propensities of her gray mare—she actually found herself for some inexplicable reason praying now that her foreman would win.

"It's the last time I'll see him scratching that old skyscraper," she said to herself, "I'm prayin' that this once he sticks on." A random phrase or two from the Bible she had heard in the days before her life with Dan Crockett came to her. It was about a man who wanted to do a great thing, but had no strength. "Remember him, God! This once—strengthen him!"

There was a reason why the Widow Crockett now, virtually on her death bed, was wishing that her famous old outlaw should be broken. She did not fully understand her feelings at that moment while watching the contest, but when the fight was over she knew why that strange prayer had welled up in her memory.

Phil Wyndham had mounted. The mozo—a little rat of a man with shreds of black hair hanging over red eyes—evinced no excitement because of his absolute assurance of the usual outcome. He held the outlaw bridle, in which he had methodically tucked a gunnysack. The bucker, for a moment blindfolded and puzzled, stopped her pawing and rearing.

"Lock your spurs, *señor!*" the mozo advised. "Unless the spurs are stuck in the cinch no man can ride this cayuse!"

Phil Wyndham tucked a rolled cigarette in the corner of his mouth. From the other corner he said: "That's barred in bucking contests, hombre, so it's barred here. The old lady and I are going to give a regular exhibition. No pulling leather, no choking the biscuit."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders and

sighed lugubriously: "Bueño. I will get some more straw."

Phil grasped the halter rope without wrapping it around his hand, squirmed about in the saddle until he was satisfied he had a well balanced seat, and then: "All right, hombre, let her dive!"

The mozo removed the gunnysack and, glancing over his shoulder with a mild and gloomy interest, watched the mare start to pitch. "A matter of time," he said.

But the Widow Crockett from behind the window of her sick room seemed to take a different view of the matter.

"This time," she said, "he will win."

She saw the mare pause, grunting breathlessly, furiously—more like an infuriated bear than a horse. The widow changed her tone. "He better hang on to that saddle!" she said audibly. "He'll break his breastbone on the horn—as Pedro did last summer. There she bucks again—the old man-killer."

The placid mozo—the only other witness to this scene of dust clouds, pawing hoofs and convulsive flesh—made his own comment: "A very foolish hombre! The mare is possessed of seven devils! So I was told by John Moonrise, the shaman."

No sooner had these words escaped him than he shrugged his shoulders as if well satisfied with his prognostications.

Phil Wyndham for no apparent reason whatever, flew from the saddle as if from a catapult. He landed in the same spot—the patch of rattleweed, now straw covered, in the south corner of the corral. When he landed Phil appeared as shapeless and still as the gunnysack which the mozo had cast to the ground. His legs and arms were sprawled in every direction and his face looked as if he had been exhumed from a grave in the sand.

The mozo, puffing a ring into the quiet air, shambled across to see if the foreman was still alive. The outlaw mare stared stupidly, guilelessly, in the opposite direction. Then heaving her shaggy belly from which the cinch and saddle hung askew, she emitted a doleful whistling sigh and resigned herself to a placid reverie.

No sooner had the Widow Crockett struggled out of bed with the intention of running down to the corral than she saw her foreman twist his head out of the tangle of sand and rattleweed and sit up, gazing about with a dazed grin.

His face was covered with dirt, his lips bruised, his blue flannel shirt ripped, his hair touseled and falling across a cut forehead. Both gauntlets were gone, lying at opposite sides of the corral, his sombrero was in one corner, the mare in another, and Wyndham himself in his bed of straw. It had taken that one last buck to litter the corral with disaster.

"She sure scattered me around some," Phil said, rubbing his head. "But, damn it, I've still got my cigarette!"

Most of the tobacco had fallen out of the little wisp of paper which he held clenched between his teeth. He lit what was left and then, refusing the mozo's proffered aid, struggled to his feet.

"Now, then, hombre," he shouted to the mild and passive horsekeeper, "don't stand there staring at me like a dummy. Saddle her up again. This time I'll rake her hair off till she howls. I'll gallop her through hell and back!"

The bored mozo shuffled across the corral and picked up the gunnysack blindfold. He was about to obey his foreman's order when he heard the Widow Crockett calling to him from her window. In response to the bidding from this one higher in command he shuffled doggedly toward the ranch house.

The Widow Crockett spoke across the window sill.

"You don't mean to tell me he's going to try again!"

"He is a very peculiar man, *señora*. A good vaquero, yes, but not a horseman. It is known among my people that a cayuse which, when all four feet are off the ground, twists its body, cannot be ridden. And yet this man wants to try again."

"You tell him I'll not allow him to try again," the old ranchwoman cried testily.

"This hombre," the mozo said with a shrug of his narrow shoulders, "does not know when he is grounded."

"Grounded? You mean beaten, hey?" the ranchwoman looked at the mozo with a curious lack of conviction. "Say, look

here, Fernando, you tell me this: I saw him mount with a cigarette in his mouth. Did he still have that cigarette when he was on the ground?"

"Non! But then again, sí! He had some of the paper between his teeth."

"Well, then you put this in your head: I've heard that if a cowboy keeps his jaws together when a high roller lands on its front paws, you can count on his being a man no one can beat. Makes no difference if he was thrown. You remember that. He weren't beat! Now vamose out of my sight—and tell Wyndham I want for to see him."

Wyndham came in answer to the summons, sheepishly rolling his sombrero and crushing the crown into shape.

"What happened, Wyndham?" the widow asked.

"Damned if I know, ma'am. I tried to tighten my knees on the critter and found she just wasn't there."

"I want for you to leave off tryin' to bust that mare," his employer said. "I got somethin' else for you to do. It's much harder."

"Harder, ma'am?"

"You're the one man in the world I'd pick out for the job."

"*I'm* the one man, ma'am. I reckon you didn't see me lose this fight with the old hell diver."

"I did see it. That's why I've chose you for this here job. You didn't lose the fight. In a manner of speaking, you won."

She added peremptorily: "Come into this here room."

CHAPTER V.

THE LONG TRAIL.

THE Widow Crockett's room did not sustain the typical Arizona atmosphere of the rest of the house. She had removed the more picturesque details; the wall candlestick, which was a cedar log with rusty nails, had been replaced by a hanging oil lamp with a painted tin fan; the olla, with its Hopi legendry, once used on the washstand, was replaced by a washbowl, a jug and soap container of white crockery—the sort that the widow had seen in the Doxey Hotel in town.

The Navaho rug—a relic of Dan Crockett's rather peculiar taste—was discarded as savoring too much of a frontier hut, and in its stead the puncheon floor was covered by a fresh, brightly hued domestic carpet. Similarly, in the stone fireplace, was a shiny stove of a modern make.

Although Phil Wyndham preferred a room with Hopi blankets and bear skins, he regarded these innovations of the Widow Crockett's as evidence of her good taste. They were incidentally an illustration of her marked dislike of the crudities of stone fireplaces, adobe chinks, and slats rived out of wood. It was quite obvious that she preferred the luxuries of town life.

"Now, then, Wyndham," Mrs. Crockett began, "I see you lookin' around sharp-like at these decorations in my room, and it occurs to me that you should orter be lookin' sharp to everything in the whole ranch."

Phil stared at the widow with a questioning glance, and was surprised at the change that had come over her. Ordinarily a tanned, deeply wrinkled little person, her illness had not drawn any contrasting marks upon her. But on this close scrutiny Wyndham could see that that same wrinkled brown skin was now like parchment, the lips were tight, yellowish. Her root-like fingers seemed weak, futile, unable to grasp—like the roots of a yucca overturned in a desert wind storm.

"I figure you want me to take an inventory again," Wyndham said, with a premonition that the old place was at last going to be sold.

"You figure right," the woman said. "Because every stick of furniture, every foot of wire in the fences, every head of cattle in the corrals, is going to mean a right smart lot to you from now on."

Yes, there was a big change coming, as the foreman had feared ever since old Doc Winkler had ordered the owner of the Seven C's ranch to keep to her bed.

"I don't want my daughter, Hallie, runnin' this cow outfit. It's what broke me." She tried to sit up—a little figure hunched in a dressing gown and a yellow flannel

blanket. Again Phil was reminded of a yucca that has been blown over—the roots unable to grip the dry sand.

"Hallie's got to have life," the woman went on; "life which I never so much as got a whiff of. If life is just about comin' my way, well and good; but it's a legacy which I leave to my gal. Y' understand? Life!"

Phil Wyndham understood that the old woman was on a very strange tack, but just what it was all about was not yet quite clear. He sat down, at her signal, in one of the brightly varnished chairs. It was not his turn to say anything as yet, he knew. He merely waited, twirling the sombrero with his red hands.

"But it ain't so important for you to understand what I'm leavin' to that thar gal. What's important is for you to understand that I'm leaving this ranch in trust to you."

"How do you mean, leavin' it to me, ma'am? You talk as if you were an old lady. It sounds as if this is a will you're reading."

"It is!" the Widow Crockett shot back, so spiritedly that her voice cracked. "I'm dyin'. That's clear. I'm tellin' you just who are to be my heirs and assigns."

Wyndham gulped. He had feared an outcome like this—had been fearing it for a month, ever since the daughter had gone up to town. His employer, the Widow Crockett—so he recalled now—had given up her long fight when she was first assured that her daughter could make a living in town.

"Look here, ma'am, I don't believe all this," he said seriously. "How about my riding to Sun-up and calling Hallie. She'll cheer you."

"Hold on, now, Wyndham, there's plenty of time for that." The woman found her voice, and spoke softly to keep it from cackling. "There's something I want for to tell you first. Something we can't take any chance on. You might not get back here in time."

"Only a two hour ride!" the foreman objected.

"Now wait. I want my gal, yes. But you get what I'm tellin' you first. I say I'm leavin' this ranch for you take care of. It's the gal's, of course, but you're to be the manager—if the old place ever pays you're to get half the profits. That's fair."

"Of course it's fair. You don't hear me objecting to a generous gift like that. But—"

"Yes, there is a 'but,'" the ranchwoman agreed. She rested a moment, gasping, then breathing heavily so that when she spoke her low-pitched voice was like a stage whisper. "I'm likewise leaving the gal in your care.

"You can take care of the ranch. I know that. I seen you do things which satisfies me. You'll fight it out until the ranch pays—a losin' fight though it may seem. You can conquer the ranch.

"But Hallie's somethin' different. I ain't so sure about whether you can handle her quite so easy."

Phil Wyndham's red face flushed until he broke into a sweat.

"God, ma'am, you're putting something up to me. The girl never so much as looked at me. There's as much difference between my way of thinking and hers—"

"Ah! Now you've said just what I was going to say myself. There's nothin' in common betwixt you, that's sartin! You're all taken up with the herd and the bedding grounds and the water holes, and where the cows are hiding their calves and where the drags have all went. I know.

"And what's she taken up with?" Again the voice was pitched too high. She choked, gasped, calmed herself, then whispered: "Did you ever stop to think that?"

"Well, ma'am, I—"

"No, you haven't. Well, I'll tell you. She's got two legacies, as you might say, which they've been left to her. One's from me. I told you that. It's this ranch, the herd, the outfit, the claim; something you can understand, put your finger on. Something you can see, that you can count. The other legacy is much more important, and it was left to her by her dad."

"I didn't know—"

The wrinkled face of Widow Crockett, from which it seemed all light had gone, broke into a slight smile. "Maybe, now that I figure on joining my old man again,

it gives me a right to talk freer about him," she said softly. "We never speak ill of the dead, because—fool notion that it is—we pity 'em.

"I'll come out straight from the shoulder about Dan; he was a good pal, maybe because he was a ne'er-do-well. They're always easy to get along with. He was, as you say, a good looker. All women folk was crazy about him!" She changed her tone. "And he about them!"

Phil waited during the silence which this last reminiscence demanded. He saw a winsome passion smoldering underneath the drooping lids. She smiled. Then:

"Further and more," she went on, "he was daft over the card deck. He'd stake anything—fortune and family—on drawin' to a bobtailed straight. I'll see the old boy again soon. He was wonderin' when he died if Saint Peter played stud! The ornery kid!"

She caught herself in a reverie, lifted her head, and the foreman stuffed the pillow behind her back. Upright, she looked with a fresh momentary vigor into Phil's eyes. "Now here's what I fear, Wyndham: The girl and Dan, her father, were as alike in character as two peas. She's going to follow in his ways. She was always bettin' you this and bettin' you that, and givin' odds for this, and staking whatever she has on a chanct. Some day she's goin' to stake too much—and maybe lose." She stopped to muse over this thought. Her head nodded.

"What was I saying? Cards? Oh, yes! Of course, it ain't the cards I'm leary of. Gals don't go in much for cards, and they never lose nothin' when they do, because, as the sayin' goes, a gal don't pay her poker debts when she plays poker with a man. But it's her whole character which Dan left her. She's a devil-may-care little sage hen, and the men find her—well, what 'll I say—easy to get along with."

"She sure is popular wherever she goes," Wyndham commented.

"That's it. Just like her dad! And she likes it. That's like her dad, too. And she's headstrong like he was, and"—the Widow Crockett added with a sigh of extreme pathos and exhaustion—"she ain't a goin' to put up with no drudgery like I have."

Her head reeled backward to the pillow. Phil saw that it was time to go.

"She won't have to put up with drudgery," he assured her, "since you're appointing me sole manager of this outfit."

The old woman smiled again. Her voice became placid, suddenly and completely bereft of all anxiety.

"All right, Wyndham; leave me," she said. "Get out of here. Go on. I feel there's too many people in here. I can't breathe. It seems like Dan Crockett is in here. Maybe he wants for to tell me a thing or two.

"Yep, it's Dan, sayin' not to be afraid; that it's easy to go from here to where he is. 'Tain't hard ridin'. Good trails. Summer fallow. Alfalfa turnin' purple under the sun—oh!"

She came to herself suddenly. "It's only you, Phil Wyndham. I thought you was Dan. Don't stare at me. Vamose, now. I'm through talkin'. Git!"

An old Indian servant, Lucy Montana, obeying the foreman's beckoning call, came from the kitchen to the bedside of her mistress.

Wyndham paused at the door before leaving.

"I'll be riding up to Sun-up, ma'am," he said.

The Widow Crockett made no objection. He thought she might not have heard him. But, as he stood, uncertainly turning his sombrero like a potter shaping a clay brim, he heard her answer:

"Bring Hallie to me before morning."

CHAPTER VI.

"I DON'T LIKE YOUR CLOTHES!"

IT was ten o'clock that night when Phil Wyndham reached Sun-up. Directed to the old den on First and Slag Streets, he galloped his horse through the deserted center of the town.

He assumed that the community was still suppressed in the moral strait-jacket of Noah Doxey's régime, but soon he saw something that abruptly changed his mind.

The Golden Cloud gambling hall was alive with lights and music.

The sight of the notorious old den ablaze in an otherwise darkened town astonished him. Could it be that he was dreaming? Was he actually being transported into that vanished era of Sun-up's frontier history? It was most assuredly one thing or the other. For there were the old saddle horses —a string of them tethered to the uprights of the piazza roofs.

Indeed, Wyndham was himself a part of that picture. His own saddle seemed to be squeaking with a jollier rhythm, the rein chains jingled. The brim of his big sombrero flopped upward with the keen night wind, and a sudden blaze of yellow light flooded the young foreman's face as he drew up before the old saloon.

Reining in his horse he stood staring at this resurrection—this miracle. He saw the sign illuminated by a hanging oil lamp:

THE NEW GOLDEN CLOUD.

"It's not the new one!" he exclaimed, mentally. "It's the genuine Golden Cloud of twenty years ago. I remember this blaze of light when I was a calf—six years old!"

Brilliant starlight, desert air, the ever-present smell of sage, the wind from the mesas—it was all as it had been before the lid was put on the boisterous, roaring bars of Sun-up.

But there was one touch which until now had escaped the astounded Phil Wyndham. It was more convincing than the retch of leather or the neighing of pintos. It was a cow country song, heard in the old days all the way from Texas to Montana.

It came drifting to him—not exactly through the windows of the saloon, but in a monotonous, eerie, inexplicable way, almost as if it had been an echo long imprisoned in the old mechanical piano of the dance hall trying insistently to free itself. It came drifting, it seemed, from somewhere far beyond the dance hall, beyond the bar, beyond the shack itself.

The small, uniform volume of its tune—unrelieved by crescendos excepting only when the wind, shifting, brought the full burden of it to Wyndham's ears: "Good-by, old Paint! I'm leavin' Cheyenne!"

Wyndham dismounted, walked his horse to one of the old tethering posts, and stepped to the door. He heard laughter, the old-time yipping of high spirited vaqueros, the sound of chips, the click of a billiard ball.

He had a vision of the long bar, sopping wet with beer suds. He entered.

There was a barkeep sure enough and—the first impression of all—a Papago Indian with a red blanket. Still attracted, charmed, by that old song, he stepped into the hall. There was no orchestra—no mechanical piano.

There were—as could easily have been imagined—no horsemen out there on the dance floor leading their mounts through a quadrille. For a moment a pang of disillusionment struck through Wyndham's heart.

"I'll be damned if I ain't plumb locoed. It's only a phonograph!"

Then he saw Hallie Crockett. In a flush of triumph and happiness she was giving a hilarious exhibition of the old Texas Tommy accompanied, by a carrot-topped young man in a tight fitting store suit, jade green shirt and brilliantly shined yellow boots. A circle of the town's characters assisted the performance by yipping and stamping their hobnailed boots.

The jingle of a vaquero's spurs vitalized the mechanical music of the record. Three men, who in the old times were noted for their quick draw when Sun-up citizens carried six-guns, were grimly engaged at stud poker, the familiar scene misty from their prolific cigars.

Laughing and joking with the circle of her admirers, Hallie failed to notice the entrance of the man from her home ranch. And for a few moments at least Wyndham was unable to catch her eye. Sam Quiggley, harness maker, had started an argument which Phil could not immediately interrupt. Sam had asked for the President's inaugural address, a record which Hallie promptly produced.

The man who had once been a barkeep turned from wiping the soda fountain glasses, the Papago in the red blanket turned from eating his chili con carne, the two young ranchers playing pool turned from their game; the whole company in

short stopped to listen in rapt attention to this voice from civilization. A great man, a historical personage, was speaking quite confidentially, it seemed, to a group of cowdogs and muckers in a desert town!

One of these muckers, however, a hermit from the Granite Wash Mountains, did not join in with the reverential spirit of the others. When the speech rasped to a close, and Hallie slid another record onto the disk, the old mucker spat and said:

"I ain't believin' everythin' that's told me in this here bar."

The crowd turned its gaze upon the speaker of this extremely irreverent remark. The red-haired young man in the highly colored clothes burst into a loud, prolonged laugh. Phil Wyndham saw his open mouth and the gold fillings of his teeth. He hated him suddenly for no reason he could exactly designate.

"And I'm wagerin' here and now," the skeptical mucker went on, "that that ain't the voice of no President."

"What 'll you wager?" was Hallie's very natural but good natured retort.

"If I do make a wager how can you prove it?" He looked around at the guffawing circle of guests. "Is there any man here who knows the President's voice?" he demanded bitingly.

This quieted them for a moment, and it appeared that the old mucker was to win his extraordinary argument until the well dressed red-haired one struck upon a happy answer: "It's written here on the record, Jo! Read it for yourself!" Inasmuch as he knew the mucker couldn't read, he considered that the argument was won. But the old man was still resourceful.

"I'll grant it's printed on this here pan. Maybe so. But you can't prove it by nobody."

"Look here, Jo," Hallie remonstrated, "this pan as you call it has the actual voice of the President recorded here—just as you write a letter on paper. It's the President's voice speaking to us—it's hard to believe, I know. It's so wonderful."

The mucker's face lighted up. He was obviously determined, in case the girl and her friend from the city were making fun of him, to call her bluff.

"If that's the President in Washington givin' that thar speech," he said craftily, "I'd like for you to put on another pan with another speech."

"What 'll you have, Jo?" Hallie asked.

"Lincoln's Gettysburg speech! Put *that* on and I'll believe you!"

The scornful shouting and yipping of the crowd was cut short by a sudden change of expression on the girl's face. Instead of joining in with the general laughter, she was staring with an almost frightened look at an insignificant cowman who had entered unobtrusively upon the scene.

They observed the serious, firm mouth, and the brown eyes peering under the rim of the big sombrero. The obvious fact that, somewhere in Hallie's past, this man played an important part, displeased them. The red-haired youth sat up straight and twisted his cigar about in his mouth, puffing warmly.

Sam Quiggley, the harness maker, recognized Phil Wyndham as the foreman of one of the outfits of the cattle range to the south. But it was Wyndham himself who broke the sudden, tense silence. For the moment every one in the room had the peculiar feeling—an intuition common to all guests past and present at the Golden Cloud bar—that this stranger was about to make trouble.

Having created this general impression Wyndham, his features almost threatening with the seriousness of his mission, said calmly:

"I'd like to talk to you, Hallie—alone."

Hallie could not tell by the note in Phil's voice whether his tidings were bad or not. Optimistic as she always was she refused to succumb to the first natural fear—that something had happened to her mother. She paled slightly—a circumstance which the men about her misconstrued.

It was Mr. Frederick Hayden, the gentleman in the colorful suit, who took matters into his own hands, realizing of course that the crowd was backing him.

"I am the owner of this establishment," he said, "that is, I am a partner with Miss Hallie Crockett—Miss Crockett, whom we have nicknamed 'Sun-up's Sweetheart.' We all object to any man horsing in here from

the desert and demanding to talk to her alone."

"There's only one voice which it can talk to our Hallie alone," the barkeep put in, "and that's the phonygraft."

"Maybe all you gents don't know who I am," Wyndham said quietly, "and I'm not going to take the time to explain to you. Get out of here now, every one of you. I've got some news to tell her."

"You'll tell *me* who you are, before you go busting up this meeting!" Hayden said.

Although there was no reason for Phil Wyndham keeping his identity a secret, this last remark of the citified proprietor aroused all the latent stubbornness and deviltry that the Crockett foreman possessed.

"Look here, stranger," he said. "I don't like your clothes—in particular, the green of that shirt which looks like stinkweed. You get out of here or I'll tell you who I am with this fist."

"What's happened, Phil?" Hallie cried petulantly. "If you want to see me, come in here in my private room. There's to be no more fist fighting in this bar."

Sam Quiggley, accepting his first chance to speak, called out: "It's only one of her mother's drag punchers from the Seven C's outfit. He always prefers fightin' to explainin'."

Fred Hayden shrugged his shoulders and began chewing the end of his cigar to shreds as Hallie led the stranger into her room.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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HEADIN' SOUTH

BOY! She's cold! Whee-oo-o-o!
Won't be long befo' th' snow,
Birds have lef' here long ago,
Time for bums to grab a tow—
Say, 'bo, le's blow!

Le's blow to a fleecy Southern sky,
Where th' moon hangs low 'n' th' sun hangs high;
Chicken legs 'n' custard pie
Are handed out to them that know—
Say, 'bo, le's blow!

D'ya hear that "hog" as she popped 'n' drank
Down there under th' roun' red tank,
While 'er headlight flickered on th' town's one bank;
Ain't nuf food here for a crow—
Say, 'bo, le's blow!

Here she comes—pulling that grade,
Her drivers clanking a cannonade,
Sure is some sweet serenade;
Right here she'll be running slow—
Say, 'bo, le's blow!

B. U. Davenport.

So This Is Wedlock

By JOHN D. SWAIN

Author of "The Owl-Man," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

SLAPPER DUNN had borne his moniker so long that he scarcely remembered that he had been christened James; but he was so registered as a voter, registered three times, to be exact, since he belonged to an organization which believes in voting early and often, regardless of weather, thus offsetting those effete citizens who, if election day chances to be inclement, conclude that the result is not in any doubt, and that one ballot can't affect it anyhow.

Every big town seems to have its East Side, where flourishes a primitive form of paternalism. It is highly efficient, overlooking no individual within its precincts. It is intensely practical, reaching down to provide milk and shoes for the destitute children, block dances and chowder parties for those of riper years, coal and potatoes for the aged. By a nicely graded system of henchmen, heelers, gang leaders, shyster lawyers, bail brokers, deputy bosses, each receiving verbal reports from the man lower down, and imparting them to the one higher up, the big boss is in as close touch with every living soul within his domain as the Arab chieftain of a nomad tribe.

Itinerant peddlers, pawnbrokers, patrolmen, bootleggers, lodging-house keepers, and plain American citizens, each and all have their pedigrees, qualifications, records, and ambitions filed and cross-indexed, although not a scrap of paper may exist upon which non-partisan league, vice-squad, or any of the irritating gumshoe-and-keyhole reformers might seize.

In such a benevolent despotism Slapper Dunn had been born, and had always lived. He knew of no other system, and if he ever gave thought to it at all conceived of the State and Federal Constitutions and of in-

ternational relations as nothing more than an elaborate and highly specialized scheme of ward politics, based upon unquestioning service, supported by graft, and rewarding its units therefrom.

The saffron journals he read supported this view, the soap-box orations strengthened it, and its complete reasonableness appealed to his intelligence, which was that of a precocious and observant urchin.

Meet Mr. James "Slapper" Dunn, if you are not over fussy whom you meet. And that you may at the outset see him as completely as possible, meet him in Porky Phelan's School of Physical Culture, over Stein's garage on C Street. He wears only sketchy trunks, gym shoes, soiled eight-ounce mitts, and a tantalizing smile.

He is just turned twenty-one, and has been a voter for three years. He strips at a hundred and thirty, has a flat chest and thin, wiry limbs. He is pasty colored, but with that strange vitality of the slum dweller who succeeds in weathering infant mortality. His features are unmarred, and not unpleasing, hair brown, eyes ditto, teeth sound though stained with nicotine, as are several of his fingers. Properly clad and manicured, and maintaining silence, he would pass as a college sophomore or a bank or hotel clerk or automobile salesman, or almost anything undistinguished yet respectable.

Just at present he is squaring off at Kay-O Dugan, a husky welter nearly as hairy and quite as grouchy as a young gorilla. Whatever he hits, falls down. Porky Phelan is trying to make a boxer out of him, and the Slapper is giving him a workout.

Observe him closely, and learn how he acquired his moniker. Kay-O moves about flat-footed, hunched up, with outthrust jaw and a look of grim determination. He is always willing to take two wallops to score one. Trouble is, he usually takes more than two, without scoring any. The lighter lad circles him as a sub-chaser might dart about a coal barge. He dances on the balls of his feet, his hands moving in and out, the aggravating grin never leaving his lips.

He ties Kay-O up in knots, and then laughs at him. When the other throws over a haymaker, he turns his head the merest fraction of an inch, or side-steps, making him miss by a hair. Then he flicks out with open glove, and stings nose or eye. Finally, behold! He brushes Kay-O's good right lamp, turning in a couple of winkers and making it water. Like a flash, the Slapper shifts over to the blind side, while Kay-O flounders clumsily about, completely off balance.

Now! You say: For the finishing punch! For Kay-O is wide open, and blind on one side. And now appears the reason for Dunn's alias. *He doesn't pack any wallop!* He can't punch, and knows it. While Kay-O carries the deep sleep, but can't connect. If Dunn had his kick, or Dugan his speed, a new star would twinkle in the fistic firmament. But the Slapper hasn't; and Kay-O hasn't. So, that's that!

Here endeth the first lesson; for which Porky Phelan grudgingly slips the Slapper two fish. Merely that we may get to know him a little better, let us follow him for the remainder of the evening in his usual haunts.

It is just nine o'clock. The Slapper goes into Jocko's pool room, pausing to wolf a couple of corned beef sandwiches, a dill pickle and a cup of coffee at the lunch counter before settling down to bottle pool in the rear. An hour later he emerges with his two dollars, and five more. He drifts down the line, and sits into a two-bit game with the chauffeurs in a garage specializing in stolen cars. He deals a nasty hand of poker, but is up against some very good home-made paper to-night, which he fails to detect. At eleven, he rises from the oil can he is sitting on, tosses his half-smoked cigarette into a pile of waste, and strolls out flat broke.

Fifteen minutes later he bumps into Shadow Rosoff, who deals in case lots bearing forged labels. He has just had two hurry-up orders, and as he cannot be in both places at once, he slips the Slapper a sawbuck to deliver two suit cases to a lodge of thirsty brethren. One good thing leads to another; and so, in the clubroom one of the ward heelers recognizes him, and gives him a cryptic message to deliver

to the big boss himself. He also gives him three bones.

Memorizing the message, and pocketing the money, the Slapper sets off to locate the boss. He isn't so easy to find, at that; but the lad has been trained to a sort of perverse faithfulness, and finally locates him in Flop Tyler's joint, at 2 A.M. This is the first time the Slapper was ever able to crash into the swellest faro dump east of the avenue. Not knowing when he may again be able to pass the human camera who guards Flop's armor-plated door, he determines to make the most of his opportunity.

Two hours later—at a quarter past four—he leaves the place without a nickel in his pockets, but with some gorgeous buffet grub inside, and an imported cigar in his mouth. Which he smokes as a matter of plain duty—much preferring his own villainous brand of saltpetered fags.

And so—as Mr. Pepys used to say—home, and to bed.

Such was Slapper Dunn. Such his simple habits. Never since he sold newspapers as a kid, had he held down a regular job. Yet strangely enough, never yet had he pulled anything really felonious. He was often broke, but not for long. He knew a score of ways to stake himself. Driving a temperamental night taxi, and no questions asked; gambling in petty ways, and cheating when he could get away with it, which wasn't often in the sort of games he sat into; showing-up ambitious pugs at Porky's gym; waving the towel at the ringside; running errands for the minor chieftains.

He was regarded by all, the bulls included, as harmless, a good guy, but without the nerve to pull off anything big. So he had never been asked to do a stick-up or a loft job, or to push queer money, nor was he ever given a chance in the semi-finals even against men he made to look foolish in the school of physical culture.

There remains but to speak a word as to the Slapper's family history. One night in Dink Robey's saloon, his father—never a cautious man—had called a stranger out of his name, without smiling. Mr. Dunn had died so suddenly that the undertaker had been unable with all his skill to erase the look of surprise from his face. He looked puzzled at his own wake; and probably does so still.

Jimmy was nine at the time. His mother he could not recall, as she had died before he was a year old. He had no living relatives, and slept when at home in a room he rented from a Polack, who with his family of eight occupied the other two rooms of their suite.

Of Slapper Dunn to date, this is all. He was perfectly contented with his existence, because he knew of no other. Save for boisterous outings at some crowded beach resort he had been out of the city but twice, when he had gone up the river to deliver a message—and once a watch-spring saw—to two men who were doing time there. He had never heard a bluebird, or beheld a flaming oriole build its hanging nest, nor seen the wind ripple a sea of wheat, nor heard it singing in the pine trees. His contacts with the great outdoors had been gained in back lot baseball, or when, swimming like a rat about the river wharves, he had emerged dirtier than when he went in.

Quite naturally, he wanted to get his hooks on a bigger stake than any that had come his way yet; he was a classy dresser, according to East Side standards, and a free spender like all his gang. The underworld breeds few misers.

Matrimony he abhorred. It meant getting a steady job, and lots of kids, and rent to pay, and having the old woman frisk your clothes whenever you come home stewed. It meant shrill vituperation, and certain obligations, not too onerous perhaps, but nevertheless real. So, while he had his romances, they were not serious.

Teckla, a pretty squarehead with whom as partner he had won many prizes fox-trotting; Bashka, the brilliant, exotic flower that bloomed in the old pawnbroker's garden, whom he cultivated for financial reasons; a wop, and a Lithuanian, and half a dozen more who had for a brief period held his interest, but with whom he had not associated the thought of orange blossoms, and the inevitable perambulator. The only one he had courted with any serious intent had been the daughter of an alderman who stood high in the esteem of the

big boss himself; and her father, finding him home one night, had kicked him all the way down two long flights of stairs and onto the street.

The Slapper was not offended. He knew that there was nothing personal in it. Merely O'Toole's perfectly natural anxiety to forestall a mesalliance.

In the natural course of things young Dunn would have drifted either higher or lower; have become a gentleman bootlegger, or an odious stool-pigeon, or, ceasing to be a mere cog in the organization, have burgeoned forth as one of its directing heads. It was mere chance rather than any act or fault of his own that turned his steps in a new and unexpected direction.

He was down by the abandoned car barn the night that Iron Reedy shot and killed Joe Watts. More than that—he was the sole witness to the last act in the long and bitter rivalry of these two, both ex-gangsters and gunmen, later prominent in municipal politics.

Slapper Dunn was a partisan of neither, had no interest in the result, and no desire to testify. He lost no time in getting away from the place.

Late that night in Jocko's pool room, a furtive lounger sidled up as he was chalking his cue, and whispered a half dozen words in his ear; whereupon he nodded, finished his game, and without making any display about it, sauntered over to another joint in whose little back room he found Rhino Bennet, handy man for the big boss, who looked up when he pushed through the swinging door, motioned to a chair beside his table, and shoved across a black bottle and a sticky tumbler.

"'S this way, kid," Rhino mumbled. "Ya gotta beat it. *Now!*"

"Who? Me?"

"Yeah. You. It's orders."

The Slapper nodded uncertainly.

"Where to?" he asked.

Rhino Bennet relighted his cigar.

"I'll come to that. A place ya never heard of. Up in the kerosene belt. Yer train leaves in one hour."

Dunn's jaw slackened.

"But I gotta get my duffel first!"

"Nix," Bennet denied. "Home is the one place ya gotta lay off of. Prob'ly they's an office man up there now, waitin'."

"They got nothin' on me!"

Rhino nodded. "Sure. I know. But *you* got something—and they aims to choke it outa ya. See?"

The Slapper saw at once. No need to mention names!

"Ya'll be took care of, proper. Till after the trial—if there is one. A hundred bucks a month. I got the first stake right in my poke, now. The rest 'll come by reg'stered letter every thirty days. Course, ya gotta have a new name tag."

"Smith?" suggested Dunn.

"*Naw!*" Rhino spat in disgust. "Any stranger labeled Smith or Jones is under suspicion even in a hick town. Joe Harris. How's that? Might be Yid, or Yank, or Limey, or plain coon. Joe Harris, of Wedlock, Maine."

There are few so utterly destitute as to lack some little treasure, some mementos that cannot be abandoned without a pang. Slapper Dunn never left anything of intrinsic value in his room with its broken lock. But there was a scrap book, containing records of famous baseball players, pugilists, porch climbers, and politicians he had known, or seen in action. And there was a brilliant green necktie with yellow polka dots, a pair of easy dancing shoes, some souvenirs of race meets, a dozen cheaply effective photographs of young girls, and a perfectly good set of brass knuckle dusters. These he could not bear to see pass out of his life forever.

He explained it all to Rhino Bennet, as also that he owed two dollars rent to the Polack.

"I'll square him," Rhino promised. "And when it's safe, I'll cop yer junk and shoot it on to ya by parcel post. After the dicks leave."

A trifle shamefacedly, the Slapper went on to explain how, every Saturday night—unless he was busted, or forgot it, or something like that—he brought home a box of candy for the four youngest Polacks.

"They'll miss it somethin' fierce," he said. "The old man don't earn much jack."

With perfect gravity Rhino reassured him.

"They'll get the sweetstuff every Sat'dy night. For as long as yer have to stay under wraps."

And the Slapper knew that he would keep his word. Such is the custom of the East Side.

"How long a space I gotta serve up in the bushes?"

"Dunno. Mebbe a month. Mebbe a year. Headquarters wants to pin something on Reedy the worst way. It would tickle 'em stiff to make him take the high voltage. Ya lays low till things is squared, because without ya, they got no case. And of course," added Rhino deliberately, "if ya squeal, or even if ya gets picked up accidental and made to talk, ya know what it means!"

The Slapper knew. It meant they would bump him off, sooner or later.

"I'm no squawker!" he muttered.

Rhino made no reply to this disclaimer, but dived into his pocket and produced a long, green train ticket, and a timetable on which were scribbled a few cryptic notes. Referring to them, he rapidly outlined to the Slapper just what he was, and was not to do; and fifteen minutes later a taxi deposited him within two blocks of the station, where a sallow-faced man joined him.

"'S all right," he wheezed. "They's no office men hangin' round. Nobody but the reg'lar yard bulls."

It was the peculiar talent of the sallow-faced one, that he knew and could penetrate the disguise of every detective who had been on the city pay rolls for longer than a fortnight.

So, Slapper Dunn walked confidently through the waiting room, and passed the wicket, and followed the long platform to a very shiny sleeping coach named Arcadia. One minute later a coal black porter showed Joseph Harris to lower number seven.

II.

It was the first time he had ever set foot inside any sort of coach save a smoker. The ignorance of the "wise" male of the city is more profound than that of any other human being save possibly the Australian bushman or the dweller in the interior of Tibet. Once wrenched from his environment he is easily gulled, unbelievably credulous; than he, none is so rustic.

For a long time after the porter had left him alone he sat upon his bed, his feet resting on the floor, eyes surveying a neat economy as strange to him as the first glimpse of an immaculate hospital ward to the outcast whose head has been bashed in and who awakes to a prevailing whiteness of walls, beds, attendants, steeped in the aroma of relentless germicides.

It took him a long time to discover the use of the tiny web of hammock swung between the windows. Still later, he grasped the idea of the clothes hanger swinging behind his heavy drawn curtains. When he experimentally put out the odd little incandescent by his pillow, he could not relight it. The train had bored through a mile-long series of tunnels and was streaming past endless slits of street cut from solid chunks of masonry, each exactly like all the rest, before he had awkwardly disrobed and disposed of his clothes. He was traveling without luggage, even to the extent of an extra collar or a toothbrush. His hundred dollars, together with the five or six he had on him when Rhino Bennet surprisingly exiled him, he stuffed beneath the pillow case upon which he laid his head, but not in slumber.

Beside him unreeled the swift miles of an unfamiliar countryside. There were seemingly endless stretches of solid trees. Then a small village would flash into view surprisingly, dark save for the depot lamps, thinning out into isolated farmsteads, and giving way once more to what seemed to the sleepless youth a real jungle. He had not thought much about his country aside from the metropolis where he had been born and wherein he had spent all his life; certainly had conjured up nothing like this. He had supposed it to consist of many towns and cities, separated by little intervals of grass and scattered trees. Now he began to visualize it as a great and comparatively unpopulated wilderness with only here and there a settlement.

Sometimes the train slowed down in passing through a town; and he caught sight of groups of idle youths of his own age

lounging about the station, or leaning against the fronts of pool rooms or garages. To such, his heart went out. They were the sort he understood; and he wished that his inexorable onrush toward the unknown might be checked, that he might listen to their vapid talk, and smell the clean asphalt. But they were whisked back into the distance, and again he would find himself staring at gloomy leagues of forest, or over barren acres of pasture land.

There were stops at the larger cities, of course; New Haven, Hartford, Springfield. Mere villages compared to his home, but having enough in common to send the surge of nostalgia through him. Between Springfield and Worcester there were elevations that gave him a wide sweep across country. He was depressed by the countless miles of lake and river, swamp and woodland, flooded by moonlight, but unlovely in his eyes. Somewhere beyond Worcester he fell into a troubled sleep; and when he awoke, the character of the scenery had changed. They were skirting the Atlantic seaboard, and had entered the southern end of Maine.

He breakfasted uneasily in a dining car that reminded him of a glorified night lunch; and all during the forenoon he was absorbed in a succession of beach resorts strung like beads along the B. and M., with swell cars and millionaires and buckboards and pretty girls showing lots of nice teeth, amid a pervading aroma of clams, salt water and seaweed. Then Bangor, and a change of trains with several hours to wait. Here he loitered about the streets, and bought himself a few necessaries, including a fine suit case he found in a pawnshop.

A hobo whom he encountered told him that Bangor was but a sad travesty of its former self when, with the advent of a horde of lumberjacks and sailormen twice a year, it had been the toughest city east of the Mississippi. He offered to show the Slapper where he could get a drink.

"It's a good place," he promised. "They trun me out last night!"

The boy refused, but slipped him a quarter. Then he hunted up a restaurant; and presently, boarding a dusty local, rode most of the afternoon and finally, near the end of the line and day, its one street hugging the rocky coast line, he came to Wedlock, a village of some five hundred alleged human beings, one-time builder of full-rigged ships, now devoted to blueberries, potatoes and lobsters.

Rhino Bennet had given him no information as to where he was to find lodgings during his exile from civilization. In fact, he never knew why Wedlock had been selected, or how Bennet or the Big Boss even knew of its existence. In his circles few unnecessary questions were asked, and fewer answered.

He was noted with faint interest by the half dozen middle-aged men about the station. One of them took the limp mail sack and shambled off with it. There were no trunks, but a few boxes were claimed by the local grocer's helper and hoisted onto a wagon with the help of the stationmaster and telegrapher. An elderly woman who had been visiting in Bangor was greeted without enthusiasm by her husband, and together with numerous paper and cardboard bundles and one bulging satchel was hoisted into a buckboard and driven down the road. To the remaining citizen, a man of leisure, the Slapper addressed himself.

"I come up here 'count of being outa hospital," he lied easily. "Where's they a hotel or boarding house?"

The one he addressed, a loose jointed, leathery faced fellow, was slow in replying. He took the stranger carefully in, from his new straw Bangor hat to his pointed and perforated tan shoes. Then he spat an amazing amount of amber juice onto the track, and said: "There ain't no hotel. Never had no summer folks here. Ain't got the t. b., hev ye?"

"No; why?" countered the Slapper.

The Wedlock man waited until he had worked up another mouthful of tobacco juice.

"'Cause I'm coroner and health officer here. That's why."

After a moment he added indifferently: "The folks that jest druv off down the road might take ye in. Dunno. Name's Tucker. Live half a mile down the turnpike. Ye can foller their wheel tracks easy enough. Ain't been nobody else along to-day."

The Slapper grinned. Then he lighted a cigarette, and looked up and down from the station platform. To the left, three or four stores and a church indicated the center of the town. There were several square dwelling houses set back from a little common, or green, elm shaded and having in the middle a granite statue of a soldier wearing baggy clothes and a flat, visored cap. Farther along the houses were smaller, and widely spaced. To the right the road rounded a little hillock of sand, anchored by wiry beach grass. He picked up his suit case and followed after the Tucker buckboard.

As his informant had said, it was easy to trail the deeply cut wheel tracks in the white sand of the road. He passed half a dozen small houses, each with a yard in front, inclosed by white palings. Hollyhocks and sweet Williams bloomed in them, and against the white walls. Rambler roses clambered over the front door. At the backs, dories were drawn up on the beach. One of the houses had a long wharf, or landing stage, at the end of which a sailboat was tied, her mainsail dropped at the peak and lazily flapping. Gulls screamed overhead.

Five minutes beyond the turn of the road brought him to the Tucker place. He knew it because the buckboard stood at the rear. The house was surprisingly large, with a gambrel roof and many small paned windows. The door was wide, and set above a worn step, the half of an old grindstone. A brightly burnished brass knocker gleamed against the dull green of the panels. Green blinds repeated the note; and a mighty lilac at one end rose as high as the second story windows.

He pressed the wrought iron latch of the gate, and passed up a wide path bordered with huge clam shells. Never having seen a knocker, he used his own knuckles; and presently a young girl opened and looked pleasantly into his eyes from her own wide and rather surprised blue ones.

She was plainly but cleanly dressed, and her color, he thought, beat anything he had ever seen. Her hair was too severely drawn back; but there was plenty of it, and it was reddish gold, like mahogany. She was wiping her hands upon a big apron. They were pretty hands, but rather red.

"What is it you want?" she asked. And her voice, somehow, made you feel that she could sing, if she tried.

"Can I see your father?" the Slapper asked.

She shook her head, smiling.

"Don't see how! He was lost at sea when I was a baby. I never saw him."

The Slapper turned red, and was sore at himself for it.

"What I mean is, a guy up at the station told me p'raps I could get myself boarded here. He said Tucker was the name. Is he in?"

The girl nodded. "I'll call him," she said. "I'm the hired girl here. Will you please step in?"

He followed her into a square hall, and thence to a large, dark room leading off at the right. It was the parlor, hence used only on special occasions such as funerals, or when the minister came to call, or when the Ladies' Aid Society met at the Tuckers. He seated himself upon a horsehair sofa, and nearly slid off its surprising surface; but the girl had already left the room and did not see.

The Slapper glanced about the great, dim room. His eyes fell upon strange ornaments; a narwhal tusk, the model of a square rigger upon the mantel, flanked by a peacock feather and a big pink shell; some ancestral portraits of villainous mien. He wondered idly what they had done time for. He hadn't the slightest doubt but that they were famous criminals in their day. His musings were broken by the arrival of Tucker, wearing his hat, and regarding him from mild eyes as he lounged in the doorway.

"Evenin'," he said. "You wanted to see me?"

"I come up here fer me health," announced the Slapper. "Just outa hospital. The doc said I needed—"

"What was you op'rated on fer?" Tucker asked with interest.

The young man hesitated for a second only. "'Pendicitis," he decided.

"Hurt much?"

"Naw! 'Course not. I was doped."

Tucker nodded. "Most everybody seems to have it," he agreed. "My grandsire, he died of what they called inflammation of the bowels in them days; but Doc Pettee tells me what he prob'ly had was this appendix thing. Only they didn't know nothin' about it them times."

He stood there, regarding the Slapper in a friendly way.

"Letty sez you want board? Who was it recommended Wedlock?"

"My doc told me to beat it up to Maine. No place special. In Bangor I asks a feller and he names a half dozen places. This was one. So I dropped off here. They told me they was lots of fresh air."

"That's right. I dunno as any place has more'n we have. *Ma!*" Tucker bawled startlingly, causing the stranger to jump.

Mrs. Tucker, still wearing her visiting clothes, waddled fatly down the hall to stand at her husband's shoulder.

"This young feller—what's your name? Harris? Well, Mr. Harris 'lows he wants to board with us a spell. Fix him up, can we? He's had his appendix took out."

Tucker's last statement sounded exactly as if one were speaking of some venomous creature, rendered harmless through having his fangs drawn. But obviously he meant nothing of the sort. It was merely a bit of interesting news in a place where news of any sort was precious.

Mrs. Tucker, plump and comfortable, smiled.

"Must of come down with me from Bangor," she remarked. "I been visiting my half-sister there."

The Slapper nodded. "Likely, ma'am. I didn't see you in the smoker, though."

"*Haw-haw!*" laughed Tucker. "Ma riding in a smoker. That's rich, that is!"

"I guess we can put you up," the lady decided. "How much was you wantin' to pay?"

The applicant didn't know, and passed the buck back to her.

"Well, I s'pose you'll want your washin' done. And things is high sence the war. I don't see how we can afford to ask less'n six dollars a week."

The Slapper gulped. "That means board, too?" he inquired.

"Why, of course. We set a plain table, but there's always enough, sech as 'tis. Not fancy things like you git in the city. Jest plain grub."

"You gotta new boarder," said the Slapper.

The hired girl, Letty Dean, showed him to his room. It was somewhat larger than the entire apartment of the Polack, and its bed was a four-poster; not one of the fine pineapple top sort, but with simple lathe-turned maple posts. There was a mighty bureau the size of a portable garage, three chairs and a table. Letty had fetched up a big mulberry pitcher of fresh water which she set upon the washstand, on whose rack hung a regiment of clean towels. A cake of yellow soap stood in its dish. The girl turned to go back downstairs.

"Supper's ready, when you've washed up," she said pleasantly.

The boy brought a keen appetite, whetted by the salt air. He was helped to a great plate of fish hash. There were seed cookies, two kinds of pie, cottage cheese, various jams and preserves, sour pickles, hot tea. The meal was strictly a business affair; nobody made any unnecessary talk. Mrs. Tucker saw to it that their boarder had enough of everything on the table.

Letty sat down with them, and once or twice she caught the Slapper's eye and smiled. But it wasn't at all the sort of smile he had so often encountered in restaurants back home. There was nothing invitatory in it; nothing bold. It seemed merely the friendly outreaching of one young creature to another, a stranger whom she wished to make welcome. Curiously, it disturbed him much more than any smile that had ever been cast his way. He ate prodigiously, and hurriedly; but he was glad when the meal was over.

For half an hour or so he sat in the dusk with Tucker, upon the stone step at the front door. It seemed suddenly cold to him; but the old man was in his shirt-sleeves. They spoke but little; and at last Tucker said: "W'al, it's been a long day. Reckon I'll turn in. Got to git an early start to-morrer."

To his surprise, although the hour as announced by the bell in the church steeple

was but eight, the Slapper was ready also. He could not remember when he had gone to bed before midnight, and remarked upon his unusual languor.

"You had a long journey," the older man said. "And this salt air always makes folks sleep at fust. Take you a week, mebbe, to git wonted to it."

The thick feather bed into which he seemed to sink fathoms deep, oppressed him with its softness. He missed the familiar lumps of the Polack shakedown. He turned uneasily, his ears assailed by the recurrent sigh of the tide waves near by. But it was less than five minutes ere he was dead in slumber.

He slept profoundly, yet not dreamlessly. Throughout the night he was companied by Letty's drowned father, a savage old man with seaweed inextricably tangled in his whiskers, and with sodden oilskins dripping on the hooked rug beside the bed.

"You leave my gal be!" he admonished, fixing the Slapper with cold, watery eyes. "Don't you go to gittin' brash with her, or I'll come in with the flood tide and ha'nt ye!"

In his dream, the Slapper was not surprised, nor scared; but when he woke, he was tired from his night long efforts to reassure the old man of the sea.

It was light when, roused by Letty's knock at the door, he opened his eyes; but when he looked at his watch he thought it must have stopped; for the hands gave only five o'clock. But he rose and dressed, and not until he opened his door to go down to breakfast did he discover that the girl had left a jug of hot water for his ablutions.

III.

The Slapper silently accepted a helping of fried eggs, coffee, buckwheat cakes and maple sirup, with—surprisingly—half of a custard pie left over from the night before. He began to eat mechanically, vaguely amazed that he was able to do so. Back home, breakfast had been a casual affair. He rose late, anywhere between ten and noon, smoked two or three cigarettes while dressing, lounged over to the nearest dairy lunch for a cup of coffee, and read the police and sporting news. In perusing these items his eyes were from time to time necessarily arrested by headlines announcing such trifles as the assassination of some Balkan ruler, the death of a Pope or prime minister, a famine affecting a few millions in China or Russia, or the discovery of a new serum; and though he hastened on to news of real import, he was not able entirely to escape a smattering of information on world affairs.

At an hour earlier than he had ever risen since the Polack's apartment caught fire, he sat now and finished a second helping of buckwheats, and another egg, which being perfectly fresh, tasted a little flat to him. Then he pushed back his chair. Mrs. Tucker looked anxiously at her boarder.

"Ain't you feeling peart this mornin', sonny? You don't scurcely touch your food!"

The Slapper glanced keenly at her to see if she were attempting sarcasm at his expense, beheld only gentle concern, and mumbled: "Sure! I'm all right."

Tucker, he noticed, seemed to have nothing in particular to do to justify such an ungodly rising hour. Later on he discovered that his host's income was principally derived from acres of blueberry pasture, useless for anything else. They ripened fast during July, and when ready for harvesting the berries, low growing and astoundingly large, many of them the size of small grapes, were picked by imported hands. The best of the crop was crated and shipped to Boston; the rest went to canneries. Many Canuck girls came for the picking.

"Pretty wild bunch," Tucker told him.

Few of the Wedlock people picked for the market. Those who gathered for their own use paid Tucker five cents a quart for the privilege, or picked on shares. Tucker netted two thousand in a good year, and the ground required no care save that every two or three years he burned it over in the late fall. This left him nothing to do save to attend to his one horse and a few chickens, cultivate a small kitchen garden, and split kindlings. Learning which, the Slapper wondered why he should find it necessary to rise at daybreak.

"Gives him more time to loaf, maybe," he reflected.

It took the stranger just two hours to exhaust the diversions of Wedlock, because he was leisurely about it. After breakfast he wandered down to the Four Corners, discovered that the general store kept the cigarettes he smoked, but charged three cents more for them than he had paid at the cut-rate city shops, looked into the blacksmith's, where a morose man was straightening an anchor fluke, located the barber-and-undertaker's little place, and the notion store.

For perhaps a mile, he wondered up the shore line. Here and there were men at work repairing fish nets, or pushing out in their dories to make the rounds of their lobster pots. One was digging fat white clams from the sand. Nobody seemed to be in a hurry; the village was full of a sedate and leisurely industry.

He was conscious of a furtive scrutiny from old eyes and young. Those inhabitants he met directly nodded to him without speaking. When, having seen all of Wedlock there was, he glanced at his watch, and then compared it with the clock in the village steeple, he discovered to his surprise that it was just after nine, and so far as he was concerned, there was nothing to do till to-morrow.

He found that the Bangor papers did not arrive until noon; and when they came, there were no items regarding his city, save the failure of a great Wall Street concern, and the statement that Mr. and Mrs. Waldo P. Skillings, of Bangor, were spending a few days at the Hotel Wallingford. So he climbed the stairs to his room. His big bed was already made up, the pitcher freshly filled with well water. He shaved, and then sat down to write a letter to Rhino Bennet asking him to send him the evening paper he always read back home, and telling him to take it out of his monthly allowance. But when it began to arrive, it was always at least a day late, and the news seemed stale and unprofitable to him.

After dinner, a meal of unbelievable heartiness, he set out to walk to the next town, three miles away. Unused to the heavy, cloying sand, he was thoroughly tired when he arrived at a village which differed from Wedlock in no respect save that the general store was on the opposite side of the street, and the church was Methodist instead of Congregational, and had one more elm in front. Thereafter he explored the country no more.

There was a bold and heartening beauty in the masses of rock jutting from clean white sand out into the green-blue of deep water, but it made no appeal to him. They had caught him too late in life; and the lack of crowds, of stirring incident, of noise even, made him as homesick as a Swiss torn from his eternal peaks to dwell in some endless plain.

In the days which ensued the feeling grew. Each seemed a week long; days filled with nothing. There were young fellows his own age in Wedlock; but they had no hang-outs, no resources so far as he could see. Of an evening they hung listlessly about the entrance of the store, and sometimes they pitched horseshoes. There was some feeble skylarking, they joked one another, using phrases meaningless to the Slapper, and he could not say that they were actually unhappy. But they might as well have been buried in the rocky little yard back of the church, with its empty graves of sailor folk lost at sea, and others whose dates indicated the astonishing longevity of Wedlockers.

"Just dead from the necks up," the Slapper dismissed the younger generation. They lacked headstones; that was all.

From sheer boredom he went fishing once or twice with Tucker or some of his neighbors; but fishing had not been included in his education. Here, it was stripped of all joyousness; it was as methodical as digging clams. One went out after a dinner; and when enough cod or haddock had been taken, one rowed home, cleaned and later ate the catch. No skill was required, the fish not entering into the game at all, seeming apathetic. After the first week, he did not go out again.

Looking drearily ahead, the visitor felt that he would have had a far better time at Dannemora. The air would not be as good, but the social advantages would be incomparably better. There would be at least a baseball game Saturday afternoon, and betting on it; and more or less surreptitious conversation all the time, on topics

he understood. There would be the game of outwitting the guards; smuggling in stuff to while away the time; the usual gossip of the underworld. Here in Wedlock was only sunshine and rain, food, sleep, newspapers a day old, a tedious and mechanical grubbing in sand and water for a bare living.

There was no real poverty, even as there was no wealth. Even the more shiftless citizen never suffered for food, or from cold. The poorest men in town were Doc Pettee, who eked out his practice by his allotment of whisky prescription blanks, and the minister, who added to his meager salary by soliciting subscriptions for family magazines, or for insurance policies.

It is notable that in all his depression the Slapper did not once consider running away. There was nothing to prevent him from taking a look at Montreal, for instance. But the little gods of his machine had indicated Wedlock as his abiding place, and here he remained until such time as word should be sent that he could return and take his place among real men. Meanwhile he was kept from absolute despair by the children.

There were plenty of them; and they at least ran true to form. They were very much like those who used to swarm over the street where the Slapper lived. Like the Polack's kids. Fully as noisy, as mischievous, much healthier, lacking the uncanny wisdom of the city brats, still they seemed to the Slapper to be real human beings, and he could understand them. He found himself pausing to watch them play sandlot baseball, or shoot marbles, and not infrequently smoke a cigarette behind a boathouse. They fought, and boasted, and played hookey. They comported themselves in all ways as reasonable human beings.

From pausing to watch them, and grinning cheerfully at them, the Slapper came to taking a hand in their ball games; and since he could throw a feebly curved ball, and above all because he had actually beheld the Bambino swat a home run, and witnessed two world series, he was elevated to the position of a minor deity and worshiped accordingly. The kids bestowed upon him the highest compliment in their power when they chewed fine cut openly in his presence, knowing he wouldn't tattle.

He gained the esteem of the proprietor of the store by ordering through him a complete new baseball equipment; catcher's mitt, four bats, real horsehide baseballs, a real mask. These he presented to the boys. Thereafter he owned them body and soul. They would have fired the village at his command. When he caught them fighting among themselves, he didn't try to stop them, but showed them how to hold their hands properly, and side step.

It was boys that he understood; he paid no attention to the little girls other than to buy them such candies as the notion store afforded when they happened to meet thereabouts. Some statistician has made the pleasing discovery that the mental age of the average American is about fourteen; and the Slapper was a little below the average. He possessed a fund of unholy knowledge; but knowledge is not wisdom. Nor did he make any attempt to impart it to the Wedlock boys.

The village parents were no fools; they took due note of the fact that the stranger in their midst, Tucker's boarder, played around with their kids a lot; and they soon probed the juvenile minds and satisfied themselves that no harm was resulting therefrom. And because no subtler compliment can be paid a man or woman than to like the children they have reared, the Slapper was secretly liked himself, and at the same time despised as a youth without any visible means of support. His story of a hospital operation was generally believed, but it was felt that he was plenty strong enough to do some sort of light labor. Wedlock was not too industrious, but its every citizen had a vocation that supported him and his after a fashion. There were no loafers.

Of course there was Major Hendrie.

Every town, however humble, has its leading citizen. The Hendrie house, big, square and ugly, standing in acres of weed-grown yard, with a big iron basin which had once contained goldfish and over which stamped the rusty iron statue of a moose, stood empty most of the year. Its owner

was locally considered to be one of the country's magnates. He had a small yacht with a sailing master, deck-hand and Japanese steward, and whenever he stopped in the city was not satisfied with a mere room at the best hotel, but took a suite of two. He also belonged to at least three clubs, could play golf, had nine pairs of shoes and a valet, and ate food cooked by a Swiss chef.

From time to time he spent a few weeks in the old home of which he was sole survivor. He wasn't at all uppish, the Slapper was told, and called folks "Ed," and "Ella," liked to chat of old school days, and could always be counted on to contribute to any village project. Then, without warning he would steam away in his yacht for Bar Harbor, or take train for Portland, without saying good-by or anything; and like as not next thing they'd hear he was in Rome, or Tokyo, or somewhere.

The Slapper often saw him strolling up and down the one street of Wedlock, wearing tweed knickers, smoking an old brier, switching at burdocks and hardhack with his stout walking stick as if it were a mid-iron, pausing to gossip with some shapeless woman across her fence, or with a man shucking clams, or else herding a crowd of youngsters into the notion store for ginger ale. In this respect he was the Slapper's only rival. But the boys looked upon Major Hendrie with his fifty years as an old man, ripe for the grave; while they accepted the Slapper as one of themselves.

The days slipped by, lethargically, and the Slapper envied the hop-heads he had known who, by snuffing a little snow or rolling a pill could create their own private heavens and hells, peopled with villains and houris, enormous and brilliant fruits and flowers everywhere, monsters and prodigies. At this time, had he possessed any dope, he would have tried it to shorten the dragging hours. But he slept ten hours a night, his appetite did not diminish, and he began to put on weight. Not fat, but good hard flesh. His face browned. Back home they would scarcely have known him for the pasty faced, good looking shadow that flitted from Porky Phelan's gymnasium to Jocko's pool room, a fetcher and carrier for the sable powers of the underworld.

There were nights when his dramatic sense functioned in dreams and gave him a sort of vicarious relief. From the city came high grade boxworkers, bent upon cracking the Wedlock bank. The Slapper, foiling them, won the devotion of the village, and headlines in the metropolitan press. He married the only daughter of Major Hendrie, who promptly died and left him heir to untold millions.

There were discrepancies in these dreams. To begin with, Wedlock had no bank. The nearest was in Millerville, twenty miles south. Also, Major Hendrie had no daughter. And had such a band of crooks descended upon Wedlock, the chances were that it would embrace some member known to the Slapper, some one whom he could not in honor turn up. So, even in his visions there was a sense of futility.

But the time was fast approaching when the Slapper was to learn that drama, of a sort, is inescapable in any place where men and women live together. No matter how dull or prosy the spot, how bovine its denizens, the elemental passions will thrust ugly heads above the sleek current of life and involve one even as he yawns and wonders that the westering sun seems to have got stuck, somehow, and is unable to call it a day!

IV.

An audience is a basic necessity to the normal male, like food and drink, shelter, or love. Naturally enough the Slapper turned to Letty Dean, the hired girl, for sympathetic appreciation of his lurid past.

The girl suffered no loss of caste through her menial employ. She was regarded as one of the family; ate with them, sat in the family pew on Sundays. Mrs. Tucker worked as hard as she did. There were plenty of pretty girls in Wedlock. Some of them were more lovely than Letty; but none excelled her in freshness of coloring, wealth and luster of hair, and few equaled her in ability. She would have attracted the Slapper's fancy anywhere; and situated as he now was, it was inevitable that he should be moved by her wholesome presence. In

the cool of the evening they usually sat in the back yard beneath a big locust. There was a hammock; not fastened to the locust. which is treacherous in its limbs, but attached to crosspieces Tucker had set up. There was also an old rocker; but oftener than not they sat on the grass and talked.

The Slapper had a way with women. It had always been easy for him to "make" them, to win their interest with his rapid fire kidding, his brisk repartee, the hints of desperate deeds down the alley. He built up his biography, of course, as men do; slurred his failures, changed names and dates, enlarged upon the parts he had played. When his imagination was working right he could make himself out as a dangerous character, though magnanimous. A sort of urban Robin Hood.

Quite early in their acquaintanceship he became aware that his stories were not going across as he had expected. If he could intrigue the cagey city dames, he was warranted in supposing that to this pretty little hick he would shine with a real though sinister splendor. It was a shock to him to learn that Letty's attitude was one of pity. She seemed to like him, but he sensed a slight contempt. Obviously, the things he prided himself on did not seem admirable to her. She regarded them as indiscretions that he might possibly outgrow, and which meantime were better left untold.

Never before had the Slapper suffered pity from a girl. Sympathy over some bit of hard luck, yes; but nothing like pity! And as his stock of small talk was about exhausted when his own deeds were told, he was more or less dumb. The final blow was struck when he learned one hot night while the locust leaves did not even stir to an offshore breeze, that his own patronizing regard of the hired girl as one who had never gone farther afield than Bangor, was radically wrong.

Letty Dean was the orphaned daughter of a sea captain. Her blood ran with the current of voyagers. Strange countries were familiar to her. After her mother's death she had been taken by an uncle, also a skipper; and had with him for several years plowed the Seven Seas. She had wandered through the mazes of Naples, and had played with little Chinese girls while her uncle's ship was loading at some treaty port. She had been far enough north to be able to read until midnight off the Norwegian coast; and had crossed the line many times. She had never read one of the popular South Sea novels, but had many times gone swimming with Kanaka maidens. She had beheld Vesuvius at night, smoking sullenly; the pavements of Liverpool and Valparaiso were known to her, and—leaning over the taffrail—she had bartered for queer fruits with coal black natives off the Gold Coast.

She opened her small trunk and showed him curious shells and trinkets, old coins, funny headgear, wicked looking knives, things made of bamboo and ivory and tortoise shell and feathers of birds, picked up all over creation. She could say things in a dozen languages and dialects; not many, because all this had happened long ago—she explained—and when she was only fourteen she had been dropped ashore at Wedlock, to go to school. Her uncle had been her teacher up to then; she could box a compass, read charts, knew something of astronomy, and much of geography and history. Her first year ashore, the uncle had been lost with all his crew; thereafter she had dwelt in Wedlock. The odd thing was she did not seem to feel cramped, or lonesome. She had almost a thousand dollars in the bank at Millerville; some day she might use it to go to the Normal School. There was no hurry. She was only nineteen. Meanwhile, her interest money was accumulating; and she liked the Tuckers.

After learning all this, a matter of several evenings, the Slapper felt abashed at his own immaturity. It was he, rather than she, who was the hick! She had seen a man stabbed to death on the Marseilles water front; had been aboard when her uncle's crew had fought off a junk load of Malay pirates. What, to her, was a gang fight in the back room of a saloon! Not to mention a session with the mitts at Porky Phelan's place.

At first he was sulky; but the girl's irresistible good nature soon healed the sting. She was simple enough, for all her experiences; and they, he learned later, were not so unusual for a Maine coast town. Old

Crackenthorpe, a victim of hard times and harder cider whom he had grinned at for his rube outfit and small-town philosophy, proved to have spent three years on end without touching ground; and he had prospected for gold in Alaska, and been arrested in Whitechapel besides. He knew of places that were not even mentioned in the geographies. And there were others; three children had been born aboard ship. Two had been round the world. The Slapper consoled himself by the reflection that, after all, his home city had everything they could find in any clime. But he lost some of his cockiness, none the less.

One night Letty seemed to have dressed a little more elaborately than usual. Nothing classy, of course, like the skirts back home; but fluffy, sort of, with a nice blue ribbon threaded in her hair, and a sash to match. Her best shoes, too. Stubby toed, though, and funny low heels. But he liked her in the make-up.

When, about half past seven the bell began to ring, she rose primly.

"Would you like to go to church with me?" she asked.

"Church? What for? 'Tain't Sunday!" He wondered.

"It is the regular Thursday evening meeting," she had explained. "But don't go unless you want to."

"Sure!" he agreed. "I don't mind. Try anything once!"

"Don't you ever go when you're home?"

"Yeah. Easters, 'most always. And to funerals. But never at night before."

The street was mildly populated. Solitary old men and women, couples, small family parties, all wending toward the old meeting house. As they passed the general store, the usual gang of village youths were loitering about. They made remarks as the different worshipers passed; rough laughter trailed after them. There was a conspicuous silence as the Slapper went by with Letty; but one had scowled at them, his large mouth set in a tight line. The Slapper wondered what was eating him.

"That's Micah Shelby," Letty told him when they were out of earshot. "He is bad. Always provoking a fight with some one. The boys are all afraid of him."

"Who? That big zany?"

"He's terrible strong. He's licked every boy—or man, too—who would stand up to him. He's sort of a leader."

The Slapper glanced back. He hadn't noted him particularly. The bad boy stood on the edge of the sidewalk, staring after them. He was big boned, a little round shouldered, with enormous hands dangling from very long arms. His head seemed small in comparison with the great hulking body.

"He stands too close to the ground," the Slapper decided.

Outside the church door another group of young men lounged. They watched the girls, who were giggling in a subdued manner, or with eyes demurely downcast; and one or two edged shamefacedly forward and went in with their own particular "sweetie." Whereupon his fellows jeered him in hoarse undertones, and nudged one another in the ribs. Later on, after the service had begun, the remaining males entered and took the rear seat, from which vantage point they indulged in furtive pranks, keeping hands busy, but with faces set in pretended seriousness. They were a trial to the old sexton who was present to keep order. They never did anything so openly that he could identify the offender. They were the sons of pious folk, standing between the frank outlaws who never went to church at all, and those who never missed going.

Letty piloted her escort to a modest seat about halfway down the aisle. The place did not seem to him in the least like a church. It didn't smell familiar. There were no candles. Lights were oil lamps with tin reflectors set against the side walls. Long settees served for seats; the meeting was held in the vestry. A red-headed girl seated herself at a small organ, whose valves she worked industriously with her feet, while she pulled fussily at the various stops; vox humana, clarinet, chimes. In a moment the minister rose from his seat on a low platform at the end of the hall, and uttered the opening prayer. Then he announced a hymn. After which ensued a prolonged silence, mysterious to the Slapper.

Presently from a dim corner rose a quavering voice. An old man had started a

favorite hymn of his youth, not in the book; his voice was weak, yet sweet. Alone, he sang the first stanza:

"The midsummer scenes shine but dim,
The fields strive in vain to look gay;
But when I am happy in Him
December is pleasant as May!"

One or two tried to help out, but nobody else seemed to know the words. The lone voice faltered, grew discouraged, died away. Another long silence befell.

Then, with a suddenness that was startling, a woman rose from the opposite side of the hall. Her shoulders and head were muffled in a plaid shawl; it was impossible to see her face. Her words were mumbled and hurried. The Slapper alone paid any attention to her; the rest had heard the same statement every Thursday night for years. She seemed to be a very wicked woman, deserving of a long stretch at the least, if not worse, by her own confession. Yet she insisted that she was very happy to-night; some act—a surrender, she termed it—had brought her peace unspeakable. As abruptly as she had begun, she ceased, dropping back into her seat as if bludgeoned. Immediately the minister called for another hymn.

"Let us *all* rise up and *sing!*" he said, and began to beat time with outspread hands attached to bony wrists incased in frayed cuffs. This seemed to be a familiar tune; everybody but the Slapper joined heartily. The loutish youths on the back seat sang in a ridiculously nasal manner, which caused the sexton to glare at them, though there was nothing he could do about it, as they pretended to a desperate seriousness.

From now on the meeting went with a good deal of zest, skillfully stimulated by the minister, whose eyes wandered ceaselessly over his little audience, picking out here one, there another upon whom he called, announcing another hymn when all else failed. There seemed to be no formal procedure. An enormously tall, thin man knelt with difficulty. When he had done praying he seemed to rise joint by joint, taking a long time about it. Others merely repeated a text from the Bible. Letty did this, and her unexpected voice, clear and sweet in his ear, made the Slapper jump. He thought at first that she was addressing him.

Then, calamitously, he was called upon by the pastor. Though he looked directly at him, the Slapper did not at first realize the import of the request. When Letty nudged him, he was horribly frightened, and all the strength seemed to have departed from him, leaving him dead below the waist. The minister smiled encouragingly.

"We are deeply pleased to see in our midst to-night the young stranger who is living with us," he said. "Will he not say a word?"

Then, as the Slapper merely stared back with bulging eyes, he added: "Just encourage us by speaking a word for the Saviour?"

Like a sleepwalker he rose to his feet. He was conscious of a craning of necks, a glimmer of pallid faces in the light of burnished tin reflectors.

He opened his mouth, but to his surprise no sound issued therefrom. He made a second effort, and it seemed to him that he trumpeted like an elephant.

"*Sure! He's all right, I guess!*"

He felt the profound and shocked silence which followed his effort; caught from the tail of an eye the amazed look on Letty's face; and then the competent clergyman announced: "We will close by singing Number One Hundred; all up for Old Hundred! *One-two-one-two!*"

Two or three old men shook hands with the Slapper at the door, and called him "brother." They were deaf, and had not heard what he said. Letty introduced him to the pastor, who had scurried from the platform and shot through some secret passage to gain the entry in time to speed the scattering flock with his blessing. The Slapper was grateful for the deep shade of elms along the street outside.

"What on earth made you say that, Joe?" Letty asked, more petulantly than he had ever heard her speak.

"What could I say?" he defended himself. "How'd I know they was gonna ask me to say anything at all?"

"It was an experience meeting; every-

body is supposed to testify. That is, all believers are."

"Then whyn't they swear me in?" he heatedly asked, testifying having but one connotation for him. "I don't want to testify to nothing, anyhow. You didn't tip me off they was gonna pull anything like that."

Letty laughed, her easy good nature quickly restored.

"I didn't know the minister would call on you," she said, "or I would have helped you make up something nice to say. We will be prepared next time."

He secretly assured himself that he would be prepared by being absent; but said nothing further about it.

At the general store he noted that four or five of the hangers-on still clustered about its darkened portals, among them the tall figure of Micah Shelby. As they passed, he remarked audibly that "any city dude that tries to steal my girl is going to git whopped some fine day!"

The Slapper stopped, but the girl seized his arm and whispered: "Please! Don't stop here. I hate brawls. Come along, for my sake!"

He yielded reluctantly.

"What's he mean, anyhow? Are you his jane, huh?"

"He's less than nothing to me! He calls sometimes; I can't refuse to see him. I dislike him; but he comes of awful nice folks; his father is a deacon in our church."

"I should worry if his father is a bootlegger and drives his own Rolls-Royce!" threatened the Slapper. "He don't want to get gay with me, or I'll crown him! No rube desperado is gonna bawl me out."

"He isn't worth your notice," she insisted. "Just a loafer. No, that's not quite fair, either. He doesn't loaf. He has more'n a hundred lobster pots set, and owns two fine dories he built himself. But he is a bully. Everybody will respect you more if you just ignore him."

The Slapper grunted. He wasn't crazy about being respected, he mumbled; but from where he came, little back talk was taken, and he wasn't going to begin up here in the bushes. Then he felt that Letty might reasonably take this as a reflection upon her home town, and changed the subject.

"Some scenery you got on to-night, girly," he hazarded.

It was always safe to praise them. They all fell for it. Indeed, Letty did smile, partly at his manner of expressing himself.

"I made it myself," she admitted. "From a pattern in a New York fashion magazine."

"It mighta come off'n Fift' Avenoo," he asserted. "Got class to it. Made the other girls look like they was wearing each other's things, on a bet."

The days dragged on, not too tediously now that he had Letty to talk to nights, and the kids to play around with daytimes. Sometimes, in emergencies, he helped old man Tucker. As when, rain threatening, and the first crop of hay out, he found how hard it was to pitch it up into the bays of of the big barn; and again during a dry spell, he tugged numberless pails of water to the vegetable patch. He made himself useful to Mrs. Tucker and Letty whenever they would tolerate him about the kitchen, which wasn't often.

Once or twice there were motion pictures at the church vestry; a session in town meeting confirmed his belief in the efficacy of graft and ring rule. Everything was on a much smaller scale than in the city; the rewards were infinitesimal, most of the town officials served without salary. But to his experienced observation, there were little deals being put through, secret agreements carried out. An undesirable lot was dumped onto the town for a public improvement. A piece of road mending was scamped, leaving somebody a fat profit. Rum running from the Canada line fattened certain pockets.

These hicks, he reasoned, were as crooked as they dared to be, or the conditions permitted. Not all of them, of course; not even most of them. But then, there were straight-shooters even in the big burg!

He didn't come in contact with Micah Shelby, though he saw him nearly every day. Soon after the experience meeting at the church, Micah called one night upon Letty. She received him, and even sat

under the locust tree with him, to the Slapper's disgust. He stayed in the back yard, out of earshot, but with a weather eye peeled for any indiscretion upon Micah's part. All three were stiff and formal, and the rival departed without even the slight satisfaction of holding Letty's hand in his own freckled paw. No reference was made to the call; nor did Micah come again.

The knowledge that he had a rival, especially that he was the village bad man, naturally enhanced Letty's desirability in the eyes of the Slapper. He began to think more seriously about her. Whenever she spent an evening with some girl friend, he mooned about despondently, waiting for the click of the front gate to announce her return. At two or three small parties of young folks, molasses candy pulls or the like, he was her escort. They were invited together, as a matter of course. He had begun to be recognized as her beau. The Tuckers sometimes joked them crudely about it. And yet, quite contrary to his usual dashing style, he had never put his arm about her firm young waist. Not that he didn't want to; he couldn't have told what restrained him. She wasn't at all offish; likely as not she would have been glad to be petted a little. But the risk was too great. Back in the city, if a girl got fussy, you simply threw her down and got another. But here in Wedlock there was nobody else he wanted! And life without her companionship loomed up horrible indeed.

The first of the month rounded up; and Rhino Bennet's check arrived promptly. Nor was anything deducted because of the newspaper mailed to him. Rhino sent no word, not so much as a line. That was his way. When it was safe for him to return, he would be tipped off. Meanwhile, the case against Iron Reedy was not mentioned in the press. It looked like the dicks were quietly at work; probably trying to locate Slapper Dunn. He, on his part, dared send out no letters. He would have liked to slip the Polack kids some post cards with pictures of the Maine coast; but this might disclose his hiding place. He was cut absolutely off from home.

Little annoyances, so slight that he could not resent them openly, proved that Micah though silent, was not forgiving. If he passed the gang at the store, one of their jesters was quite likely to carry himself, or hold his fag, or gesture in an uncouth imitation of the stranger; but never looking at him, nor giving him a chance for a comeback without making himself ridiculous. And once one of the kids he played ball with told him that Micah had referred to him as a "cradle robber."

In general, his preference for the society of Letty and a parcel of youngsters was the cause of much crude mirth. Had he been a real man, they argued, he would prefer to join them in their lounging and horseshoe pitching and occasional hard cider orgies. The older people, seeing him gaining weight and tan, were satisfied to accept him as a convalescent. He had looked sickly to them when he arrived. The white, pasty appearance was gone. His eyes were clear and bright. He now ate heartily as any Wedlocker. No longer did Mrs. Tucker worry over his lack of appetite!

August came, and with it one of the great events by which Wedlock marks time. The church picnic loomed ahead, and Letty began to prepare for it by remaking an old dress, and deciding about their basket collation. *Their's;* for of course she and Joe would go together, on the back seat of the Tucker beach wagon.

V.

WHEN, every five years Wedlock celebrates its Old Home Week, the chief event is a clambake. There are speeches by sons and daughters who have become famous since leaving their native village, there is a grand get-together meeting in the old white meeting house, with many little family reunions and a grand climax of fireworks on the green at night. But to the returning children all is subsidiary to the ancient, tribal clambake, with the great hole dug in the clean sand, the heated rocks, damp seaweed, and layer upon layer of fat white clams, little green lobsters, tender chickens, and fresh-cleaned ground fish. Nothing else so potently evokes the past for the exiles.

But the annual picnic of the Wedlock church is always held inland, where a pine

grove marches down to the shore of a fresh water pond well studded with water lilies, and supplied with two or three leaky boats, without which no church picnic would be complete.

While the outing is ostensibly a church affair, none are debarred. The infidel and the village drunkard are welcome, and they of alien faiths may share the pound cake, the multitudinous pies, the sandwiches and jellies of the pious; but they must be content to slake their thirsts upon home made spruce beer, hot coffee, or the lemonade served from a washtub by the two prettiest King's Daughters.

Even in so small and uneventful a place as Wedlock, some one must carry on the trifling business of life; the depot master must remain at his post, or obtain a substitute; somebody must stay at the post office; there are always one or two invalids even in such a salubrious village. But saving these, it may be said that all Wedlock is present and accounted for.

As early as nine o'clock buckboards and carryalls and Concord buggies and flivvers began to string along the sandy road that winds in and out for the three miles to the picnic grove. There were a good many pedestrians. With much good cheer and laughter and greetings tossed back and forth, the cavalcade, loaded down with its passengers and covered baskets and pails and bottles wrapped in damp cloths, made its slow way out of town. By eleven, all who were coming were present. Games had begun; two small children had already fallen into the pond and spoiled their Sunday best, and one had been stung by a yellow jacket; an old gentleman had sat down upon a gooseberry tart; three parishioners had been poisoned by ivy. No detail was lacking.

The affair held no special allure for the Slapper, who compared it with the vast chowder parties of his own home town, proceeding by chartered steamer, with two jazz bands, deck space for dancing, free beer on draft below, and five hundred swell lookers ready to try anything once. But in a quiet way he enjoyed himself. He was with Letty Dean, and she was looking her best; and that best had something on any girl he had ever known. The grub was the best ever; for, at these community affairs, a keen sense of rivalry caused the good women to outdo themselves in the preparation of gorgeous pastry, soul satisfying salads, fried chickens, baked hams, conserves and jams. Even the birch beer had a bit of a wallop to it, as well as a tang of the wild woods.

No effort is made to impart any religious flavor to the church picnic. When everybody sits down to eat, the minister asks a blessing, and it is an unusually long and carefully prepared invocation; but that is all. There is nothing else, neither hymn nor collection. A good time is had by one and all.

Toward sundown a chill breeze swept in from the sea. Those afflicted with rheumatism began to think of starting home. Of the vast stores of goodies, there remained not so much as one basketful of fragments. All the games that were known had been played, all the gossip retold. The annual church picnic of Wedlock was about to end. It was at this moment that the Slapper, coming up from the edge of the pond with an armful of lilies he and Letty had gleaned, found Micah Shelby posted squarely across his way.

During the long day Micah had sulked in his tent with his cohorts. The gang always attended these picnics, because outings were not so plentiful in Wedlock that one could afford to miss any of them; but it was customary for them to remain somewhat apart. They did not give countenance to the childish pastimes in which young and old engaged; their heads were unbowed during the pastor's blessing; they condescended to eat, and eat heartily, but they sat at one side, by themselves, critical of everything and every one.

In seasons past their leader had from time to time deserted them to lavish his attentions upon some village maiden; last year it had been Letty Dean who endured his rustic gallantry. But this year he was a pariah; and all day his morose eyes had followed the "city dude" who had wriggled his slimy way into their Eden, and stolen his girl. Micah had expressed himself freely to his cronies, and in terms that

roused them to boisterous guffaws. But nobody had paid them any attention. They remained as an uncongenial background, a necessary evil like the mosquitoes, and so far as possible everybody forgot that they were among those present.

Now, with the picnic drawing to its close, Micah had worked himself up to the right pitch of righteous indignation, and as Letty and her escort came up from the scrap of beach fringing the pond, he stood before them, so that it seemed necessary to turn aside in order to pass. Inasmuch as there was plenty of room, there being no real pathway here, it would have been easy enough to ignore him and circle about him as he stood flatfooted; but the Slapper had not failed to take note of the lowering glances which had followed him all day. Therefore, and before Letty guessed his intention or could stop him, he reached out and pushed Micah smartly on the chest. And as the village lad also had not anticipated this swift thrust, he lost his balance and, stepping back, found his foot entangled in a blackberry vine, wiry and tenacious. An instant later he suffered the ignominy of sitting down violently upon a mass of hostile thorns which easily penetrated the seat of his breeches.

It must remain doubtful as to what he might have done had the Slapper paid him no attention; but now, with the eyes of his henchmen, and of Letty upon him as he floundered at his rival's feet, there was but one thing to do. He rose lumberingly, but quickly, and yelled: *"I'll knock the tar out of ye, Mr. Dude! Think ye're smart, don't ye?"*

Even as he spoke, he began peeling off his coat and rolling up his sleeves, catching them with the pink garters he wore. From every point the picnickers began hastening to the spot. Most of them had been aware of the smoldering resentment of Micah, and the village regarded the boys as rivals for the hand of Letty Dean. There are no secrets in Wedlock.

Micah was ready first, had spat upon his great hands and began to stamp upon the ground like a young steer. The Slapper, as willing as he, was more leisurely. He, too, took off his coat, handing it to an urchin. Another took his hat. They wrangled for the privilege of caring for his garments; the links were removed from his cuffs and divided. All the small boys clustered behind him, adoring eyes fixed upon him. There was no question as to whom their devotion belonged! Even the little brother of Micah whispered—careful that nobody overhear—*"Oh, God! Let him lick Micah!"*

Thus before battle does weak human nature ever seek to fix the Great Umpire, whether the occasion be a gang fight or a Gettysburg.

The sympathies of the elders were more mixed. Nobody liked Micah; not even his own father and mother went so far as that. But there was the native son element; the immemorial pride in the exploits of the home raised. Micah's reputation extended farther than the boundaries of Wedlock; at the cattle show he had overthrown the champions of other towns at wrestling, collar-and-elbow style, and in throwing weights. Some pity was felt for the slender city chap, who was the under dog. On the other hand, he was an interloper. Letty had been Micah's girl—in village opinion, though not in her own.

Whatever their feelings, they all hastened to secure a good view of what was about to happen. From the edge of his eye the Slapper caught sight of the concerned faces of Pa and Ma Tucker, the white blotch that was Letty's face, Major Hendrie, smiling cheerily as he trotted round the circle trying to find a vantage point. Micah's fellows were in a little knot just behind him.

Some feeble efforts were made to nip the affair in the bud. The minister's voice rose in exhortation that brotherly love and charity prevail. The man to whom the Slapper had first spoken upon his arrival, he who confessed himself to be both coroner and health officer, started to make official protest, then decided not to. Micah was a bad man to thwart. The innocent bystander received no consideration at his hands. A few women began to cry, more from excitement than because they were really concerned. Micah raised his big arms, and tried to look as mean as he felt.

He was, the Slapper admitted to himself,

one whale of a lad. His forearms were thicker than his own biceps, and his chest was round as a keg. His doubled fists looked the size of young cabbages, and much harder. But all this did not disturb the Slapper. He had put on the mitts too many times with men twice his weight, and made them look foolish. Mere muscle meant nothing whatever to him. And because he had so often appeared in public, and before audiences so much more critical and outspoken than this one, he felt not the slightest sense of embarrassment. Even Micah, angry as he was, and delighted at the chance to show off before his townsmen, was not so entirely at ease.

The Slapper was glad that he wore sneakers instead of the narrow toed tan shoes he had first selected. He took careful note of the footing; it wasn't too good, consisting of wiry turf, somewhat uneven, flanked at a distance of about thirty yards by the pond and the grove. One might easily slip here, or turn an ankle. And although he had been through his share of gang fights in which bare fists—and worse—had been used, he would have been more at home with a nice set of gloves laced upon his hands; say five ouncers, with the horsehair neatly worked back from the knuckles.

Micah took the offensive. It wouldn't look good for the bigger, heavier man to settle back and wait for his weaker opponent to attack. So, with an awkward, raking swoop, he threw out his right with all his force behind it, making no preliminary feint. The Slapper threw up his left very slightly, and turned his head; but there was such tremendous power in the blow that, although it was only glancing, he was swept clean off his feet and stretched on his side in the grass. A murmur rose from the crowd, and Micah snarled triumphantly and jumped in. In his code, when you got a man down you did your best work. He didn't get up again until he said he'd had enough.

But the Slapper wasn't hurt. He jumped lightly to his feet, grinning. He had at least found out that the village champion packed a mean wallop. It would pay him not to get careless and let one of those haymakers slip through his defense, or he'd be knocked for a chain of lobster pots! He glanced right and left to see that the crowd was giving him plenty of room. The battalion of small boys stared up into his face as Raphael's cherubs gaze upon the Apostles. The Slapper filled his lungs and began a series of rapid and baffling feints. That is, they might have been baffling had Micah paid the slightest attention to them.

He didn't. Having, as he conceived, scored a clean knockdown with the utmost ease, he craved for another, and tore wildly in, wide open, both arms flailing.

The Slapper let him come, then leaned in and flickered out a long left that seemed merely to caress Micah's nose; but a stream of red blood spurted from it, as if one had smashed a beet with a baseball bat. It looked worse than it hurt, but it hurt some. And the yells with which the sight of gore was greeted hurt him much more. Wedlock rose, as Nero's Rome used to do, and as live men always do under similar circumstances. Micah didn't know just how it had happened, but tore after his elusive opponent, determined to get him to earth again. And now, he was mad enough to finish the job with his stout boots when the chance came.

It wasn't easy to keep away from him, partly because the onlookers crowded too close, and more because of the footing. The Slapper knew that it would never do to stand and swap punches, much less to fall into a clinch. Nobody was holding a watch on them; there were evidently to be no rounds, no rest periods. Just a fight to a finish. He was by no means certain that anybody would protest were Micah to hit low, or give him the knee. And if they did, much good it would do him!

His problem then was to take the offensive, but at long range. He began dancing in and out, bewildering his man by a tantalizing play of arms, the seeming proffer of an unprotected jaw, a quick step to one side or the other, always in motion, coming in, jumping away, doing the unexpected, and, as it seemed to Micah, the meaningless. And all the time, with straight jabs, counters, hooks, chops, jolts, he was scoring on Micah's ugly mug. On his body, too, in order to bring his hands down;

sharp, stinging blows that did not even jar the big lad, yet which by their snappy delivery gradually began to slash his face, which kept his nose bleeding in a steady trickle, half closed one eye, cut a lip, caused him to grunt when his stomach was the target.

In a regulation ring, with gloves, it would have been a short bout. With the Slapper having to guard against the treacherous footing, and in a confined space, it lasted longer. But to offset this, his knuckles cut deeper than gloves, and soon Micah's face looked so ghastly that most of the women turned away. But the men, breathing deep, clenching their fists and teeth in unconscious sympathy, grunting with each blow, never batted an eye; and the small boys huddled in an adoring band, shrill yells rewarding each effort of their big playmate.

One of Micah's eyes was now completely closed, and the Slapper was beginning to work on the other. Micah was not even breathing hard, had not been dazed by any of the buffets he had suffered, and yet was being scientifically cut to pieces by a trained butcher upon whose features no mark yet showed. But the Slapper was breathing through his mouth. Perspiration rolled down his face; unless he could stop the other pretty quick, he would collapse from sheer fatigue; and then Micah would probably stave his ribs in!

He managed to work on Micah's blind side, to keep him in the sun; but blind, bleeding, mutilated, the village boy was no quitter, and kept coming back for more; and as the Slapper well knew, you may block a lot of blows, but you can't stop them all! The champions can't do that. Even as the thought crossed his mind, Micah lunged in, swinging his right arm from a point far behind his shoulder. It fairly whistled as it came. Instead of leaping back, or ducking, the Slapper took a chance and stepped in, letting the blow pass around his head, the crook of Micah's elbow catching him in the neck, and causing him to see stars; but at the same instant, or a bit before, the Slapper started a short uppercut, rising from his toes. His left caught Micah on the tip of the chin; and because he had been fighting with tongue between his teeth, it caused him nearly to bite that unruly member in two.

The agony made even the infuriated boy cringe and falter for an instant; tears gushed from his eyes in a blinding rain. Then the Slapper deliberately and calculatingly drove his right into the good optic. Micah staggered back, sightless and helpless.

The Slapper stepped away, smiled, and dropped his arms.

"He's all in," he panted. "He's done his stuff, and it ain't good enough!"

This noble attitude, the failure to take advantage of a helpless man's condition, won practically everybody over. They could not know that the Slapper might hammer away the rest of the evening at Micah, and never knock him out; they only saw a great fighter evincing magnanimity. Micah's fellows led him away to the pond and began to wash his bloody face and to call for court plaster and bandages. The Slapper's urchins restored to him his clothes, fetched a basin of clean water and washed his hands of the blood of his rival, and shrilly debated the affair.

Little was said as the beach wagon jogged homeward. Tucker had shaken hands with him; but the men of the Pine Tree State are taciturn. Between them and the hero-kissing French is a great gulf fixed; yet both are he-men, counting not the costs when a job has to be done. Mother Tucker seemed a little disappointed not to find some slight abrasion, some scratch to which to apply her infallible salve. Letty said nothing beyond the merest commonplaces; Slapper wondered if she were sore because he had fought!

Then, when they parted early to go to their rooms, everybody tired after the long, strenuous day, she turned back, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him. Not once, but repeatedly, and upon his mouth. And she was crying! Could you beat it?

"*I was so scared that he would kill you, Joe!*" she whispered from the refuge of his shoulder.

"Who—that big ashcan? Not a chance! He couldn't keep outa the way of his own feet, to say nothin' of my fists!"

That night again, the Slapper dreamed

that Letty's father rose dripping from the sea, and sat upon the edge of his bed. But this time he did not seem hostile. He said nothing, but grinned amiably at the sleeping youth, his jaws moving ceaselessly as if upon some ghostly cud. And from time to time he nodded in satisfaction, and when he did the seaweed in his whiskers glistened, and in his furry ears the bright gold hoops twinkled.

Then he grew dim, and through the window crept the offshore breeze. The tide had turned, and was flowing back to the sea. The Slapper dreamed no more, but slept the deathlike slumber of exhausted youth, holding in his tired hand the prize of valor.

VI.

In the heat of battle had the Slapper fallen or been struck beneath the feet of Micah Shelby, the latter would have put the boots to him; possibly have killed him. But Micah, bad as he might be, was no murderer. His rage did not lessen after the fight; but the unreasoning passion which inspired the killer was replaced by something saner. He was licked, and incomprehensibly to him, by a smaller, weaker man. Henceforth, Wedlock was no place for him.

A dethroned idol is the most pitiable of objects. In a half hour, Micah's subjects fell away. He might still be able to beat them up, but he could not hold their allegiance. With a swift efficiency he sold out his lobster pots, dories and tackle; and no more definite news of him was available than that he had bought a ticket for Bangor.

In no other way could the Slapper have so endeared himself to the little town. It would not be accurate to say that no single being missed Micah. His mother wept for him in secret; but that is the eternal privilege of mothers. The gang missed him, in its way, because it had been built up about him, and threatened to disintegrate. The old sexton believed that the hand of God had been manifested. The pastor could not approve the means, but gave thanks that the instigator of much trouble had been removed from their midst.

The Slapper was embarrassed by the cordial reception he met with when he appeared next morning. He was also studied with new interest, as a sort of freak; for, aside from Major Hendrie, there were none who could appreciate the artistry with which he had polished off a fellow manifestly able to take him apart limb by limb. Nobody knew how he had done it; but all knew that he had, and were satisfied.

With Micah gone, the Slapper still had enough on his mind to worry about. In a twinkling his relations to Letty had changed. Of course, looking back he was able to trace to some extent the minute steps by which respect had turned to liking, liking to something warmer. But he had not known that he was in love until Letty's warm lips blended with his own. And the discovery filled him with something like dismay. What could he do about it? What would she expect him to do?

For the first time in his life he had been unable to spend his income. There was nothing to buy, nothing he wanted that he did not have. His cigarettes, a little candy and soft drinks for the kids, six dollars a week for board and room and laundry, an occasional hair cut by the village barber-undertaker; and he was drawing down a hundred a month! But—for how long? It might be cut off at any time. A line from Rhino Bennet, and he was adrift once more. He had no trade, no prospects, no ambitions beyond working up until he should become a little boss, and some day perhaps a leader like Iron Reedy. But competition was keen; he had never shown any ability yet save as a magnified errand boy, a fetcher and carrier.

There were other fields, of course. Bootlegging. Various get-rich-quick schemes; more often than not spelling get-caught-quick. He didn't doubt that he could get a reasonable amount of money, by hook or crook. He had never been without it for long. But then, he had never expected to marry! And if he had, it would normally have been to some girl of his own class, versed in the devious ways of the edge of the underworld in which he had always dwelt. She would not be squeamish; would

probably help him in his schemes, as a good wife should. She would wish to live in her own set, and as the Slapper himself had lived. Not at the Polack's, of course; but in a flat where 'most anything but arson went.

Suppose he were to ask Letty to marry him? There was no father to inquire as to his "prospects," his past. Letty would not ask; if she accepted him—and he knew instinctively that she was not the sort of girl to kiss a fellow she didn't like well enough to marry—she would believe that he was all that he was not. And what an awakening for her, when she should leave this big, clean, well-ordered house, the decency and calm that environed her, to smell and hear and feel the intimate nastiness of his precinct, his street!

She would be a foreigner; the friends he dared introduce would speak a tongue largely meaningless to her; the delicatessen would mock her with exotic pungencies; the cruel din lay remorseless siege to her ears. And could she ever learn to feel herself in a home? To gossip with slatterns in kimonos, drifting in from the other apartments? Shout across grimy washlines to neighbors over the way? Be satisfied with the burlesques and movies and dance halls

Not by any stretch of his imagination could the Slapper envision such a thing. And equally, he could not behold himself taking root in Wedlock, learning to fish, or sweating over a potato field, or doing anything that the village would be willing to pay important money for. That was the poison of the big burg; you either starved, or you got easy money. Nobody really worked, nobody that he knew. They grafted. They took it off of somebody that did work. They risked their liberties often, their necks sometimes; but they never perspired. Money came to have an unnatural meaning to them. It didn't represent labor; a twenty-case note was not the concrete evidence of something produced, but of something *pulled off*. A trick turned. A deal. Carelessly pocketed, easily spent. More where that came from!

It was at this time of mental and emotional uncertainty that Major Hendrie overtook him one day, sauntering along the north shore, and invited him to look at his great barracks of a house.

"I don't know why I stay on so long," he said. "Might as well be planted in the graveyard! About once in so often I come home to spend a few days, and stick along for weeks."

They turned in through the stone-pillared gateway, the grass high on either hand.

"Neighbors all wonder why I don't have it shaved and set out to formal gardens," he told the Slapper. "But the wild things look better to me. I see enough manicured yards. Needs a scythe, though. I'll get Will Harmon to cut it for the hay."

Hendrie hired a woman of the village to act as housekeeper during his visits; and his Japanese steward came ashore and looked after him. He opened the front door for them, now, bowed and sucked in his breath.

Inside, if not out, there was formality enough to satisfy any Wedlocker. Stiff legged furniture, stuffed hard as a punching bag, upholstered in crimson plush. Dark red curtains looped back with gilt cords. Steel engravings of notable but dull looking episodes in American history. Great mirrors set in walnut frames; and drooping from the high ceiling a kerosene lamp with a shade as big as a parasol, and a sliding chain to haul it up or down.

They went over the house. The library had built-in cases and glass doors, behind which lurked regiments of sullen looking books, leather bound. Above stairs, there were great square chambers with black walnut beds so enormous that the Slapper wondered how they had got them inside. Stands and dressing bureaus were of walnut, with chilly marble tops. Brussels carpets with huge nosegays of flowers, once brilliant but now mercifully toned down. A bathroom with a block-tin tub set in a wooden frame, and the only set bowl in town with alleged hot water tap. Here and there, lowering or simpering from dark corners, enlarged portraits of unauthentic looking children, and questionable characters of maturer years. Vast wardrobes revealing, when opened, moth-eaten garments.

They descended, and smoked for a while upon the piazza. A wide sweep of ocean was visible from here, as well as most of the village, since the old Hendrie place sat upon a gentle rise.

Already the Slapper had lost interest. In the silence, his thoughts tracked back to his own problem. Then he was interrupted by the voice of his host.

"What do you make out they are doing?"

The Slapper followed the other's pointing finger, and beheld two kittens in the yard below.

"Why—just playing," he said, surprised at the foolish query.

"Exactly! Playing. But how? Notice how one rolls over on his back, clasps the other around the neck, and then kicks with his hind legs? That's how lions and tigers fight. Only, instead of just pretending, he disembowels his foe that way! And why does that smaller cat creep up on his belly toward the other, inch by inch, all tensed for a spring? Because by and by he will hunt that way. He knows he isn't fooling the other kitten; but he pretends he is."

The older man smoked silently for a few minutes and then broke out, abruptly: "*Pretending.* That's all play really is. It is nature's way of training the young ones for life. Small boys pretend to keep store. Little girls have dolls, and pretend to keep house. When they grow up, they stop playing; not because they are tired of it, but because the boy now has a real store, and the girl has a baby and a home of her own."

He looked keenly at the Slapper.

"You like youngsters, don't you "

"Yeah. It ain't so long since I was peddling me papers!"

Hendrie nodded.

"I never pass a group of kids without wishing I had the vision of a prophet. Then I'd look at smutty faced little Larry, and see on his head a bishop's miter. And the lad with a slungshot and two stone bruises I'd recognize as General Smith, destined in good time to save his country from extinction in the days of the great invasion. Children *are* America! If you were to go to sleep for fifteen years, what would you find on waking up? Why, that the little boys and girls you had seen raising hob up and down the neighborhood are running the country! Policemen and aldermen, mayors and Senators; you'd consult one if you were ill, and retain another if you got yourself arrested, and you'd take orders from somebody you'd chased out of your yard the night you had fallen asleep—fifteen years before."

"Thasso," the Slapper yawned. "But what's the answer?"

"I wish I knew," confessed Hendrie. "But I know this much; the sort of country we are going to have will depend on the sort of children we are raising. Nothing's too good for them. And that's why I want to do my little bit. Listen!"

He hitched his chair closer.

"This is a horrible place, to me; I come back to it from habit. Because I was born here. But to a lot of kids, it wouldn't look so bad, with that unspeakable furniture replaced by a flock of little cots, and some unbreakable chairs and hammocks and things. There's fifty acres with it, and plenty of trees to climb, and the Atlantic Ocean for a front yard. Just what youngsters need. Do you know that ninety per cent of the men that have amounted to anything were born in the country? It puts marrow into their bones, somehow. And I want to see this place overrun with small boys from the city who never saw any grass without a 'keep off' sign close by.

"I'm counted rich here. But I wouldn't be, in your town. But I can do a little. I can turn this place over to the urchins; say averaging ten years apiece. Give 'em all they can eat of the best country fare; pitchers of unskimmed milk; hamper them with no unnecessary rules. Let 'em play their own way. If they want to fight, let 'em! Why not? They'll have to, some day. Only, some one must be here to see that they fight clean. I would have said, to see that a big boy doesn't fight a little one; but after what you did to Micah at the picnic, I hesitate to put it that way."

The major chuckled, and the Slapper lighted another cigarette to cover his embarrassment.

"About twenty lads could be put up

here at a time, say for a month. Twenty more the next month. July and August. No punishments; time's too short. If a lad is cruel, or filthy, or in any way a real menace to others, warn him. If he repeats, ship him back F. O. B. and replace with another one. And if I ever heard of my overseer teaching them any fool games out of books, I'd sack him! Have plenty of baseballs and bats and a football or two, for those who wish them; but no drills, setups, lessons; nothing but fifty acres of God's country, a clean bed, lots to eat and their own ideas as to play. Not so much as a book, even! I wouldn't make 'em go to church, as far as I am concerned. But they can if they want to, or if their folks insist. What do you think of such a plan?"

He seemed to await almost anxiously the Slapper's views.

"Hot dog, mister! That's what I'd have liked myself."

"Well, that's what I aim to do. Only, it is such a drop in the bucket! Millions of kids, and I can only handle a couple of score for two months! But it is a beginning. Other men, younger and richer, may hear about it and carry it on in a bigger way. Of course I haven't really figured it all out yet. But this isn't to be a sanitarium; I haven't the means to run one. Just ordinary, healthy boys. All creeds, races, colors. They have got to get on together when they grow up and run the country after we have gone; let 'em get used to it early. *How would you like the job of overseeing such a crew?*"

The Slapper blinked. "I'd be a hell of a guy to be trusted with a lot of kids!" he decided promptly. "Their folks would throw fits!"

"You've got every young one who can toddle alone running after you in this village," the major argued. "And I haven't heard any mothers worrying about it, either!"

"Well, there ain't much mischief they can get into here. And I was only killing time."

"A pretty fair way to judge a man is to take note of how he kills time," Hendrie said. "Anyhow, you are the one I want. I won't have anybody who is trying to teach 'em book stuff, and drilling 'em like a reform school battalion, or anything like that. So long as they don't set fire to barns or trample down gardens or run cows to death or maim one another, let 'em alone, say I! And the man who could enter into my plans would be worth to me—well, I don't know, say a thousand dollars for the season. He'd have the rest of the year to himself, and the house to live in if he wanted to."

Hendrie added: "Of course, I'd have to have a live housekeeper. Wouldn't do to get an elderly woman; they'd drive her to drink in no time. Some sensible girl who could cook, and who would get on well with boys. Wonder how that Letty girl at the place you board would do? She anything of a cook?"

The Slapper started violently.

"Who? Her? Mister, she'd make the Ritz look like a night lunch! And the kids couldn't help liking her."

The major meditated.

"You think well of her, I take it?"

The Slapper sighed, and admitted that he did.

"Well, before you definitely decide to leave us, give my idea the low down. I don't know why you are here, and I don't care. But I do know that I could trust a bunch of young truants in your hands and not feel I'd committed myself to infant damnation."

"He's a good old guy," reflected the Slapper as he trudged back to the Tuckers. "Wise, too. Got just my idea of how to handle kids!"

He told Letty about it, guardedly, not mentioning the suggestion of herself as housekeeper.

"I guess you could do it all right," she admitted. "Our village boys would set fire to the church if you asked them to! And it—it would give you something to do here, wouldn't it? Something that would be worth while."

His quiet evenings with Letty were not as pleasant as they had been. He realized that she expected something he dared not give. She was not the sort to continue to make the advances; she had kissed him, frankly and innocently, that first time; but never since. And it was plain that she was both

hurt and surprised that he was not more demonstrative. She was a proud little thing; it would kill her—he felt—if she thought she had made a mistake as to his feelings toward her.

But—what could he do? That sinister picture still dominated his mind; Letty, brought to his home city, her spotless purity subjected to the slime of his sordid precinct. He wanted to take her into his arms so badly that he had to hold on to the grass, and clench his teeth; had she been any other girl, he would have done so and let things fall out as they might!

One night, with the full moon flooding the back yard and just enough breeze to serve as a gentle fan, Ma Tucker waddled out of her kitchen door, wiping her hands on her apron. She looked out over the tops of her specs toward the locust tree.

"There's a friend o' yourn here from the city, Joe," she said.

The hair stirred on the boy's neck. "*Who is it?*" he gasped.

"Gentleman name of Reedy. I told him to come right through to the back yard."

She stepped aside, and Iron Reedy stood in the moonlight, a tweed cap in his hand.

What a swell looker he was, the Slapper thought. Thin, straight, with piercing eyes and iron gray hair and mustache, he looked like a crack cavalry officer.

"Surprised to see me, Slapper?" He spoke in a quiet, well modulated voice, like an actor or banker or somebody important. "Back home, that is what we call Joe," he added to Mrs. Tucker.

He walked across the yard, sniffing at the scent of the flowers brought out by the evening dew. The boy introduced him.

"Meet Letty—Miss Dean," he said. "Mr.—er—William Reedy."

"Delighted," said Reedy, taking the girl's friendly hand in his, and seating himself in the little low rocker by their side. "Mind if I smoke, Miss Dean?"

"If I did, I wouldn't be able to stand Joe," she laughed.

Reedy produced a black morocco case with a heavy gold monogram, and bit the end off a long Havana. He smoked a special brand, smuggled for him.

"I needed a little change, and as I had no place particularly in mind, thought I'd run up and see you, my boy. If the little lady approves, how about a little spin in my car?"

Letty clapped her hands. She had never had many automobile rides. And when, rounding the house, her eyes fell upon the glittering sport roadster with its silver-plated battery of dials and gages and registers and clock and card cases and everything, she gurgled happily.

Despite the heavy going, the powerful engine bore them along at a speed which seemed breathless to her. When they returned, an hour later, they had covered twenty miles up and down the coast.

"I want a reward," Reedy told her as he ceremoniously helped her to alight. "I always expect pay! I'm starving, and I intend to get you to wheedle Mrs. Tucker into putting me up for a night or two while I visit my young friend here."

The matter was not difficult to arrange; Ma Tucker being obviously impressed by the magnificence of Joe's stylish friend. The three sat down to beans and brown bread, a setting of boiled eggs, peach pie, cottage cheese, a pitcher of creamy milk, several kinds of preserves.

They talked and ate, and Reedy acted as if he were thoroughly at home. When he admitted that he was tired after a long run, he was shown to his chamber, and for the first time in many years was lulled to sleep by crickets and whippoorwills.

The Slapper did not so readily drop into slumber. He wondered what Reedy—whom as a local despot he had never more than spoken to—could be doing up here? He was never known to leave the city, save for a brief run to some Jersey resort, or something like that. His mission must concern the Slapper; what could he want? It was late when he fell asleep, and his dreams were troubled.

Whatever Reedy's mission, he was in no hurry to announce it. He prowled about the village afoot, talked with the natives much more easily than the Slapper had been able to do, bought one of the general store cigars and smoked it without batting an eye while swapping yarns with the pro-

prietor; went clamming with Tucker. He carried a smart leather case stuffed with an eye-filling wardrobe, including a Scotch knickerbocker suit and pigskin brogans, and looked like a million dollars. He and Hendrie met, and he heard the latter's project, and added some invaluable suggestions.

Three days passed, and not by word or look had he indicated to the Slapper that his visit was anything but the quite natural dropping in of an old and valued friend. Letty thought him wonderful, and Ma Tucker nearly burst with pride at his praises of her cooking.

Then, on a hot afternoon, he told the Slapper that he wanted a word with him. "We'll take a turn up the road," he said.

When the roadster had swept them a mile beyond the Hendrie place, he spoke.

"Know what I came for, Slapper?"

"No, sir."

"You saved me from taking the high voltage. Natural that I should feel interested in you. A man remembers little favors like that."

"'S all right," the Slapper mumbled. "Rhino squared me."

"A hundred berries a month. That your idea of what my neck is worth to me?"

The Slapper wriggled uncomfortably.

"Well, I wouldn't of said nothing, anyhow. You oughta know that."

Iron Reedy nodded.

"I do know it. I've had my eye on you a long time. Found out you was one of the few who could keep his trap closed. I can buy any other kind of service; but not that. Your kind has to be born that way."

He skillfully tooled his car in and out among the dunes.

"I came up here first of all to tell you I'm clean. No need of your sticking along here any more. And I had it in mind to take you back with me, and make you a sort of right-hand man. But now, I don't know. You look like a new man, Slapper! Guess it agrees with you, huh?"

"Sure. I'm all right."

Another period of silence, while they rounded the cape and came in sight of the lighthouse sentineling its bleak rock a half mile offshore.

"That Letty girl—she thinks pretty well of you," Reedy said unexpectedly. "Like her, don't you?"

The Slapper reddened.

"They don't make 'em no better!"

Reedy nodded. "I know. She's real. Can't remember when I've seen one just like her. Did you know I was born in a little place like this No? Well, I was. On the west coast of Ireland. But I'd forgot about it, mostly. Lived among imitations and shadows and four-flushers so long. Know why I blotted out Joe Watts?"

Reedy was given to startling changes of conversation.

The Slapper shook his head.

"Well, let it ride that way. He's dead. But he had it coming to him! And I'd do it over again, if I had to go to the chair. So that's that! But I want to square you; and now that I see how things stand, I've changed my mind. I'm going back. I'm too old to change. Habits fixed. You know, I never lushed any. And the women haven't bothered me much. Gambled a little, but not to make money. Just for fun. Power! That's all I want. It's a disease. You know, Slapper, I hold five thousand votes in the hollow of my hand. Like that."

He freed his left from the big wheel, and held it out, fingers clenched.

"Gives a bird a funny feeling, sometimes. I walk down the avenue, and pass men I know, but who don't know me from a yellow cat. Big ones. Millionaires. Blue bloods. Men with all sorts of backing and protection. And I could get any one of 'em croaked at an hour's notice! Just a whispered sentence. I got all sorts in my gang, just like an army has. Killers, expert electricians, doctors, crooked lawyers, all sorts. Get any kind of a job done. Have any crib in the burg cracked for me, to get a paper I need, or a chunk of ice. And when I agree to deliver five thousand votes and there's only four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine cast, then I know somebody's crooked, or got himself pinched!"

The Slapper listened, fascinated. This was the life! To have the power over men and property, to elect the right one and

kill the wrong one. And to be swell about it, like Iron Reedy was! Always dressed like he was going to a party. Keeping in the background, pulling the strings.

"But it's dead wrong," Reedy was resuming. "America was never planned that way. Too much power for any one man to swing. It's like I had ten thousand arms and legs and eyes. And I'm only one of the small fry, at that. System will pass away. If it don't, then we'll go blah, like Russia. But it 'll last my time; and as I say, I can't break the habit now. But get this right; I never did use my power to get a fellow bumped off! If he needed it, I attended to it personally, and took my chances."

They slowed down, came to a halt on a rocky point whence for miles up and down the coast their eyes had a clean sweep. Reedy inhaled deeply. Presently he unbuttoned his coat, and removed a long, stiff envelope.

"Open it," he commanded.

The boy did so. Within were ten one-thousand dollar unregistered Liberty Bonds.

"They're yours," Reedy said simply. "If you bring 'em back to town, they'll take 'em off you. Maybe they will up here; but at least they'll last longer."

"But I don't want them! I tell you, I don't have to be paid!" protested the Slapper.

Reedy fixed him with a cold eye.

"Thought I told you I was all clean? I don't have to buy you—nor any other man! This is yours with no strings on it. You'll never see me again—unless you're dumb enough to return to the city. You need a stake. It takes a long time to dig ten grands' worth of clams. But with these bonds, you'll be as good as anybody but Hendrie. And he tells me he can use you in a little game of his own?"

The Slapper nodded, still dazed.

"Play up to him. You and Letty, too. I've always been interested in kids. Can call about five hundred by name, and they think me and Santa Claus was born twins. They call me Bill!"

He chuckled, and sighed. "Hope to hell their folks never wise 'em up to what I really am," he said. "Not but what I might have been worse, and got away with it."

He left, that evening, for Portland.

"The minister's wife," he said to the Slapper, during their final talk. "Hell of a life! She was raised in a little Western city. Went to lectures and concerts and things. Now she's buried here, with a good man who can earn most five hundred fish in a lucky year. Seems she's been crazy for a radio outfit. I've ordered one for her. A whale. She can tune in on the Paris cabarets, if she wants to. Or, if she gets fed up on her old man's sermons, she can get Rome and hear the Pope preach in St. Peter's. Be a life saver for her. Amuse her pals, too. I talked with the blacksmith here about rigging it up. Some bird, that smith! If I had him in the big burg I could make him rich in six months. He could work any combination box there is. Regular mechanic, home bred."

A little later he spoke of Mrs. Tucker.

"She won't take a nickel for my board. Cheap at two hundred! I'm a new man inside. But Letty tells me she loves magazines; the ones with stories in 'em. So I told the minister to book her up for every one there was except the pious ones. You'd be surprised! They'll have to stow them in the barn."

They all watched him as he rolled down the turnpike. At the big dune he slowed down and leaned back.

"Had the time of my sinful life!" he called back. "Never expected to enjoy myself this way, and never shall again. *Good-by!*"

And that was the last of Iron Reedy.

Five days later, opening his newspaper, the Slapper's eyes beheld a leaded caption smeared across the first page:

WILLIAM ("IRON") REEDY KILLED.

Servant Finds Bullet-Riddled Body Outside Door of His Park Avenue Apartment at Dawn.

It was strange, the Slapper mused, how everybody seemed to want to see him go right. There were the Tuckers, and Letty. Technically he was merely a boarder. But

in fact, no son could be treated better, watched over more solicitously! And Hendrie. He had made it possible for him to do the sort of thing he'd enjoy, and still get paid for it. And the village youngsters —they tagged him around like he was an organ grinder. Lastly, take Reedy. Iron Reedy. A hard, even a ruthless man, by reputation. One who never lost sight of the main chance. The text for many a fervid sermon! Yet he, too, had tried to steer the Slapper right; to keep him from getting tied up in the crooked stuff that he dealt in. And now he was dead, without heirs, his dubious money all left to St. Joseph's Orphanage!

It looked as if everything and every one was conspiring to keep the Slapper here, in the place he had so bitterly hated at first, and where he had suffered such pangs of loneliness. Even now, he was not deceived. There were just as mean people here as in the city; just as selfish. Not as dangerous, perhaps, because in so small a place you couldn't pull the rough stuff without getting found out almost at once. But as bad at heart, and also as good. It certainly was one grand little place to condition in! Especially for city kids. He must manage to ring in the little Polacks on Hendrie's first consignment.

He turned to Letty, sitting beside him underneath the locust. His lips twitched in a mischievous smile.

"That Hendrie place, now, wouldn't be bad for a honeymoon," he suggested. "And one thing, we'd have a start no other young couple ever did!"

"How's that?" she innocently asked.

"Well, we'd be spotted twenty kids, wouldn't we?"

Her voice came muffled by his shoulder.

"Do you think that's a nice thing to say?"

"Sure it is! *For a starter,* was what I said!"

After a long silence he remarked tolerantly: "Wedlock ain't so bad, after all!"

THE END

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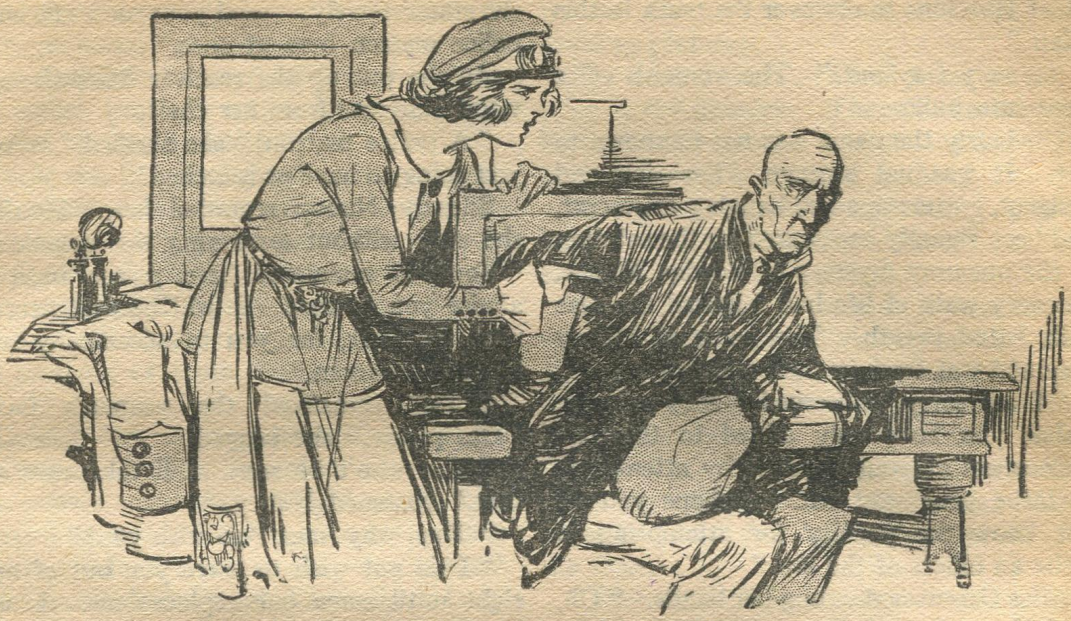
A LEGEND OF ANNSVILLE CREEK

WHERE blue and rippling Annsville Creek in sylvan beauty glides
Between its quiet banks to join the Hudson's silver tides,
While yet the redman's paddle stroked the dancing river waves,
And ancient woodland trails more thick with swift and stealthy braves,
When bright October wrapped the trees in blankets red and gold,
And lighted all her sumac fires because the nights were cold,
Fair Ann, a village maiden, met one morning long ago
A roving Mohawk warrior with eagle plume and bow.

Perhaps it was the forest spell that lured her girlish feet,
Perhaps it was a wild dark eye that flashed a message sweet,
But whether it was love or force that carried her away
A white bride to the Mohawk's lodge that autumn came to stay;
And ever when the frost returns to paint the heights above,
Ann and her chief again renew the legend of their love
Among the gold and crimson leaves, and if, behold! you seek
The confirmation of the tale, why, there is Annsville Creek.

Minna Irving.



Marked Down

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

Author of "Mystery of Voodoo Manor," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

HUGH CAVENDISH, fifty, rich, has just stepped from his automobile into the corridor of an office building when he is mysteriously struck down. A doctor attempts to revive him, but he dies after gasping a message that indicates the act is that of a suicide. Examination shows that the cause of death was a heart wound, and the weapon a woman's hatpin. The chief of police calls to his aid Dr. Nancy Dayland, a young woman who previously has solved cases that had baffled the detectives. Arrived at the scene, she at once discovers that the hatpin is poniardlike in its construction and that Cavendish, who was right-handed, had fallen with the weapon held in his left hand. Nancy first interrogates Mlle. Mignonne, a clairvoyant, who has an office in the building, but the woman does not yield a decided clew. Next she finds in an anteroom a middle-aged woman who is desperately anxious not to be drawn into the case as a witness. This is Miss Ivy Greenwood, maternal aunt of Cavendish's daughter, Dorothy. The hatpin bore the monogram, "D. C."

CHAPTER VII.

ALIAS AND ALIBI.

DEAD silence followed. It was a silence so fraught with significance set in motion by the words that the room reeked with it. Miss Greenwood's eyes never left Nancy's mobile face.

"Please," she began, "I don't know who you are, but you look like a lady. And your face says that you have a heart. Can't you help me get away from here unseen? M-m-money is no object."

Two scarlet spots appeared on Nancy's cheeks. Her dark eyes flashed ominously.

"I regret," she said coldly, "that I did not introduce myself at the outset, at the same time warning you that anything you said might be used against you."

"W-what do you mean?" asked Miss Greenwood with wide eyes.

"That I am Nancy Dayland, retained by

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 29.

Chief Hutchins to discover the truth in this affair."

"*Nancy Dayland!*" The woman's voice went into italics.

Obviously the name was not unknown to her. It was not strange. For rich and indigent, guttersnipe and haughty aristocrat, had been signally captivated by the solution of the uncanny mystery of Voodoo Manor. So every walk of life had followed the case with bated breath. The name of Nancy Dayland was fresh in their memories.

"I am sorry," observed Nancy soberly, "that you have only added to the suspiciousness of your conduct by attempting to bribe your way out. Perhaps you do not know the penalty for attempting to bribe an officer of the law."

Miss Greenwood wrung her hands. "Oh, oh!" she wailed. "Everything I have done this morning has turned out wrong and ill-advised. But I swear to you that there has been nothing criminal behind my actions and my intentions."

With a little gesture of dismissal Nancy help up her hand.

"Please," she admonished, "no more now. I shall have to talk with you later."

She took up the desk phone and called M. Renaud.

"But, yes, *mademoiselle*, with the greatest of pleasure," the voice buzzed back. "I will come on the moment."

"Knock on the door labeled Mlle. Mignonne when you arrive. Then I will instruct you further."

Miss Ivy Greenwood watched the girl's every movement with terror-stricken eyes. There was something alert and efficient about her, something which seemed to whisper that this sensitive-faced young woman saw far more than the casual observer could even suspect. How she herself had blundered!

"Are—are you going to arrest me?" she quavered fearfully.

Again Nancy held up one slim hand imperiously. "Please don't question me as to my intents. You should know that I can't answer."

The woman subsided into a helpless heap, plucking nervously at her veil.

Again Nancy called a number. "Please," she stated tersely, "send your most efficient police matron here at once."

As she put up the receiver Miss Greenwood half rose from her chair.

"A police matron!" she shrilled. "Are you going to have us searched?"

Silently Nancy regarded her. Finally she said without answering the question: "You will remain in here, please, until I advise you further. It will be first necessary, however, for you to accompany me to the next room."

Horror transfixed the woman's face. "Oh, please," she begged.

"You won't be seen. I'll take care of that," hastened Nancy.

"Then why must I go with you?"

"I do not wish to leave you out of my sight until some one replaces me. I am afraid you need a guardian." The sober tone of the girl robbed the words of any note of sarcasm. "Believe me, I am sorry. You may drop your veil again if you wish."

So the two walked into the outer room. Nancy kept her eyes on the woman as she opened the door a crack without revealing the gray figure behind it. She beckoned to the nearest policeman.

Sharply she shut the door behind him.

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" he exclaimed. "A new skirt—all dolled up in veils—"

"Hush, Jenkins," Nancy admonished severely. "Your comments are entirely out of order. This lady is to be treated with all courtesy. You are merely to guard her for the present in Mr. Fulton's private office. You are to see that she makes no suspicious movements until you are relieved."

Jenkins bowed and followed the woman in gray into the office, closing the door behind him.

Margaret Seavers was pacing restlessly up and down the reception room of Mlle. Mignonne's offices. Relief swept across her face as Nancy entered.

"I thought you'd never come," she declared. "It is so dark and dismal in here with the room all draped in mourning."

"You are Margaret Seavers?" began Nancy of the slight girl with the student-like, black-rimmed spectacles.

"Yes."

"How long have you been with Messrs. Cunningham & Winters?"

"For six months."

"You act as private secretary to both members of the firm?"

The girl nodded. Evidently her long wait and the outlet given to her emotion by pacing up and down the room had calmed her. She seemed under perfect control for the first time.

"Where were you from ten minutes of twelve to twelve?"

"Typing a letter which Mr. Cunningham had dictated a little before."

"Where were you?"

"In Mr. Cunningham's private office."

"Was Mr. Cunningham there, too, from ten minutes of twelve to twelve?"

"Yes."

"How are you so sure of the time?"

"Because he rang for me at eleven thirty. I never left the office until—"

"When?"

"When it happened."

"What told you something had happened?"

"I heard a man pounding and calling out in the corridor."

"What did you do?"

"Followed Mr. Cunningham out into Mr. Winters's private office."

"What did you first see?"

"Mr. Winters stepping hurriedly toward the door."

"Was the door open?"

"I am not sure."

"Where had Mr. Winters been while you were with his partner typing a letter?"

"In his office."

"Was the connecting door open?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because Mr. Cunningham was talking to Mr. Winters all the while that Mr. Winters was getting ready to leave for lunch."

"How could your two employers keep up an intelligent conversation from different rooms while you were typing?"

"Mr. Cunningham's office is equipped with a noiseless typewriter."

"Very good. What was Mr. Cunningham doing that he didn't go into the outer office and carry on his conversation there with Mr. Winters?"

"He was bent over some plans at his desk."

"Was the conversation about these plans?"

"I should say so, although my mind was on my shorthand notes and my typing."

"Had Mr. Winters been in Mr. Cunningham's office before he left for lunch?"

"Yes, up to the point of his leaving for lunch. After Mr. Cunningham had finished dictating his letters and turned them over to me, he and Mr. Winters were consulting over the papers at his desk."

"They continued their discussion there until Mr. Winters left for lunch?"

"Yes."

"At what time was this?"

"It must have been just before twelve."

"How do you know?"

"I heard the clock striking soon after Mr. Winters had gone out for his hat and coat. He was late, and he went quickly, still talking over some remaining points that they had been discussing."

"What happened then?"

"Why, as the man outside began to call out, Mr. Winters uttered a sharp exclamation and started for the door."

"Had Mr. Cavendish an appointment with either of your employers for twelve o'clock or for any time to-day?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Do you generally make the appointments for them?"

"Yes, when I am here."

"When do you leave for lunch?"

"When Mr. Winters returns at one."

"When was the last time that Mr. Cavendish came to the office?"

The girl hesitated slightly. "Yesterday."

"At what time?"

"At three thirty."

"How long did he remain?"

"Until five."

"Whom did he consult?"

"He was closeted with Mr. Cunningham in his private office."

"Where was Mr. Winters?"

"Busy with another client in his office."

"Do you know the nature of Mr. Cavendish's business with Mr. Cunningham?"

"I do not *know*—"

"What do you mean by accenting *know*—that you *suspect* or *conjecture?*"

She nodded.

"What gave you a hint as to the nature of his private conference?"

"Mr. Cunningham rang for me just before five."

"For what purpose?"

"He asked me to witness Mr. Cavendish's signature."

"On what?"

"Hadn't you better ask Mr. Cunningham that?"

"I shall, and he will answer just as you must do now. What was the paper upon which you witnessed Mr. Cavendish's signature?"

"It was a will."

"How do you know it was a will?"

"I know the blank form Mr. Cunningham keeps in his office."

"Are you prepared to swear that it was a will?"

The girl hesitated. "I—I am sure it was, but perhaps I ought not to swear."

Nancy nodded in approval. Margaret Seavers was acquitting herself well, very well. Her story was straightforward, convincing.

"Did any one else witness that signature?"

"Yes."

"Who was the other person?"

"Mr. Winters was the other witness."

Just then a little tap came on the door.

"That's all now," Nancy dismissed Margaret Seavers.

As the girl left the office she was replaced by the little Frenchman, the department expert in criminal faces.

"I am here, *mademoiselle*," he announced with all the politeness of the native Parisian.

"Please, M. Renaud," Nancy enlightened him directly, "go to an elevator and ring a bell. This is, of course, a mere subterfuge to cover your real reason for walking by the settle. That reason is to study the first man on the right settle who is shabbily dressed and wears broken rubbers. His cap is pulled over his face. After you get a good look at him, you will apparently think better of ringing for an elevator, appear to change your mind and come back here. I want to know if you recognize the man."

Astutely the little Frenchman bowed and withdrew, closing the door behind him carefully.

Nancy walked back and forth in the room. She was trying to get some order in her mind, there were so many things running through it. The affair was a maze already.

There were the dying words of the man, seeming to confess to suicide; there was the extraordinary hatpin clenched in his left hand, and belonging to his daughter; there was Dr. Bainbridge's testimony that Cavendish was right-handed, and his further suggestion that the blow that ended his life very probably could not have been dealt with his own right hand. This presupposed the hand of another, and thereby threw out the man's dying words! Yet in the history of crime as in natural death, dying words are held solemnly true.

But the man had scarcely entered the building, his chauffeur had hardly turned his back when Cavendish fell, mortally wounded. According to Billings the skulking man had certainly had no time to enter the building after Mr. Cavendish, and then run back again to his peering position by the door. The body lay fully twenty feet from the door.

What had happened had happened in the space of moments. Yet Billings, wheeling about at the sound of the muffled fall, had seen nothing suspicious—no sign of any one in the deserted corridor. At least, that was what he declared. Could there be any reason for his concealing something which he might have seen? His statement was yet to be corroborated by the stranger whom Nancy had not yet interviewed. But throwing out for any reason as questionable the testimony of both the chauffeur and the unknown Graham, who could have had time to efface his presence so quickly, so effectively?

Now, added to all these curious contradictory happenings, was intruded the suspicious conduct of Miss Greenwood, the dead man's sister-in-law, who had by her

own testimony entered the building and waited, without announcing her presence, in the outer room of the real estate firm. And the door behind which she lurked was but ten feet from the body.

The distinctive little tap of the Frenchman came again. Noiselessly he entered. His face was agleam with the light of triumph.

"Who is he" asked Nancy. "It is in your face that you have recalled."

M. Renaud gave a little shrug. It was the epitome of Gallic grace.

"That man, *mademoiselle,*" he deposed, "is beyond doubt Slippy Gates, just out of jail—less than a month. He has a bad record."

"For what?"

"Twice for holdups, and the last time for safe-blowing."

"My memory must have unconsciously picked out the face of this man from your criminal gallery," mused Nancy.

"Memory is an erratic master," murmured the Frenchman.

Just then another knock sounded.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE.

A SHORT, corpulent woman stood before the threshold. She seemed to breathe capability and self-reliance. Her face was plain, but pleasant and honest appearing.

"From headquarters," she murmured to Nancy. "One of the matrons."

"Come in, please."

As the new arrival entered, M. Renaud stepped out. "If there is any further service I can render, *mademoiselle,*" he began to say in parting.

"Be assured that I shall call upon you, M. Renaud," declared Nancy. "Thank you for your courtesy."

The police matron was looking about her with unvarnished astonishment.

"What a heathen place!" she exclaimed.

Nodding in confirmation, Nancy led her into the other room. She unlocked its corridor door.

"I know," she stated seriously, "that you will overlook nothing in these women whom I send to you for a thorough-going search. Neglect nothing and retain anything which bears the slightest hint of anything mysterious and uncommon."

"You can trust me," was the reply. "I've been going through suspects for twenty years. There aren't many things they can hold out on me."

Nancy glanced at her keenly. "I am sure of that," she agreed, "for I asked Chief Hutchins to send the most experienced woman he had."

The matron was not unpleased with these words.

"You are to retain each person until I come to you for the result."

"Very well."

Nancy stepped out the door and paused beside Mlle. Mignonne.

"Come," she suggested in a low voice.

Wearily the dark-clad astrologer followed the girl into her own consulting room where the police matron from headquarters awaited her.

Nancy stepped back again toward the other settle.

"Mr. Cunningham, please," she said.

Cunningham arose and followed her. He was a short, thick-set man, much of the same build as his late client. His plain, gray sack suit hung carelessly from his figure. Seemingly his interest in the practice of law was greater than that of the practice of wearing modish clothes.

Under the soft light in the medium's reception room, Nancy studied the famous barrister. There was a suggestion of leonine strength in the strongly marked features, the heavy mane of white hair, the massive head with its overhanging brow. With mild curiosity Mr. Cunningham looked about him with a quizzical expression. But he said nothing.

One big hand cupped a knee while the other remained hidden in a pocket which bagged disconsolately. Yet this man was one of the highest salaried attorneys in the city. His reputation for honor and integrity was a family watchword.

By careful questions Nancy soon elicited corroboration of all the facts which the girl secretary, Margaret Seavers, had itemized.

"Did Mr. Cavendish make an appointment to see you to-day?"

"He did not."

"You are sure?"

"Positive. No one in the office received any hint of his intended visit this noon."

"Then he wasn't coming to see you?"

"Not to my knowledge. Still he may have hastily decided to come without telling us in advance."

"Now, Mr. Cunningham," asked Nancy, "why did he visit you yesterday afternoon at three thirty?"

"Professional etiquette would not ordinarily permit me to answer that."

"Police etiquette must insist."

The famous attorney bowed. "I know. My late client came by special appointment to draw up his will."

"Had there been previous wills?"

"Yes."

"When was the last one indited?"

"Nine months ago."

"In favor of whom?"

"His daughter, Miss Dorothy, was naturally chief beneficiary."

"Was Miss Greenwood mentioned as another legatee?"

"Yes."

"To how great an extent?"

"A five-hundred-thousand-dollar bequest." He paused as if he hoped this reply would satisfy the inscrutable-eyed girl before him.

"And what else?" suggested Nancy instantly.

The lawyer cleared his throat. "Miss Greenwood was named as executrix."

"Naturally," began Nancy, "your late client would not have made a new will yesterday were it not that he wished to make some changes."

"Naturally not."

"What was the nature of these changes? In what respect did this last will and testament of Mr. Hugh Cavendish differ from that of nine months ago?"

Again the lawyer cleared his throat explosively. "Really, Dr. Dayland, this lamentable affair of poor Cavendish's extraordinary act has forced my confidences in a manner highly abhorrent to me. Had he died anywhere else—even on the sidewalk outside—you could not force such testimony from me."

"No, but the suspicious circumstances of Mr. Cavendish's death alter matters."

"Suspicious? Oh, yes, suicide is a violent and unnatural death. I suppose inquiries would have to be instituted."

Nancy let these remarks pass. Then she reminded: "You have not as yet answered my question, Mr. Cunningham. Specifically, how did the last will of Mr. Cavendish drawn up yesterday afternoon between three thirty and five differ from the former document?"

Laboriously Cunningham answered: "The testator, Mr. Cavendish, bequeathed the bulk of his fortune to charity."

"Was his daughter entirely cut out of his fortune?"

"Practically."

"What do you mean by practically?"

"She was named to the extent of five thousand dollars."

"Which is a mere pittance compared to his fortune?"

The attorney nodded curtly.

"Was Miss Greenwood likewise eliminated from major consideration in this will?"

"She was. A bequest of one thousand dollars was set down in her name."

"Who is named as executor?"

"Ah, I see you eliminate the possibility of a woman serving in that capacity!"

"Yes. Who is named?"

"Mr. Amos Shoreham, the president of the Second National, is named as executor, in this last will and testament of Mr. Cavendish."

"Now, Mr. Cunningham, why did Mr. Cavendish change his mind so suddenly—practically cutting off his daughter with a pittance from his great fortune?"

"I don't know."

Nancy scanned the strong face. "Mr. Cavendish was in the habit of dictating new wills yearly?"

"I have not said so."

"How many wills have you drawn up for your late client?"

The lawyer considered carefully. At last he said heavily: "Five, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"Covering how many years?"

Again Mr. Cunningham seemed to search his memory. "About ten, I should say."

"What was the average time between wills?"

"Roughly, about two years."

"Yesterday's document then was drawn more quickly on the heels of the last will than any other?"

"I believe so."

"Mr. Cavendish in no way, by look, word, manner or inference, conveyed to you even a hint as to the reason for his act?"

"He did not. A lawyer does not generally inquire into matters of so private a nature."

"Mr. Cunningham, did Mr. Hugh Cavendish ever disinherit his daughter and her aunt in any previous will?"

"No." The answer was labored in coming.

"Why were new wills made so periodically then?"

"I am not a mind reader. I do not fathom the mental processes of my clients."

"My question was clumsy. In what respects, then, did the other wills vary in their bequests, since you have declared that the chief beneficiaries, Miss Dorothy and Miss Greenwood, always came in for the bulk of the fortune?"

"The various wills differed merely in the matter of minor bequests, their distribution, and other technical matters."

"You know Miss Dorothy Cavendish?"

"Since childhood. I have always been the family attorney."

"What type of a girl is she?"

"Really, Dr. Dayland, your question is not in order. You can, since you represent the law, force me to answer interrogations which have a direct bearing on the case. But I cannot enter into a discussion of personalities."

Nancy's face flushed. She raised her dark head proudly. "My question does not strive to get at cheap personalities. It is necessary that I try to find out why Mr. Cavendish made a new will the day before his sudden death, and in this instrument disinherited his next of kin. It may prove to have some decided bearing on his sudden death."

"Pardon me," said the lawyer stiffly. "I misapprehended your motive. Miss Dorothy is a very uncommon young woman, of great charm, strength of character, and generosity. She is very like the late Mrs. Cavendish, whom I also had the honor to serve in the matter of her considerable estate."

"Your words," suggested Nancy, "lead me to the conclusion that you are as much at a loss to explain your client's hasty act as I am myself."

"Precisely."

"And Miss Greenwood?" queried the girl.

"She is very close to Dorothy. She has been for the last ten years since Mrs. Cavendish's death. In my judgment she is a woman of the highest sense of honor."

"Then," questioned Nancy, "you know of no recent trouble existing between Mr. Cavendish and these two ladies?"

"Absolutely no. I was completely at sea when he caused me to draw up such a document yesterday. I am sure that my surprise showed through. But if Mr. Cavendish noticed it he simply ignored the fact."

"I think that is all, Mr. Cunningham. You can suggest no motive for suicide on the part of your late client?"

"None whatsoever."

"Had he any enemies?"

"Many, as any one has who possesses strength of character, firm convictions, and the ability to climb above his fellows. Besides, Mr. Cavendish was absolutely fearless."

"You can't think of any specific enemy or enemies?"

"No. If you are trying to suggest foul play, you know one may have bitter rivals in business, enemies of that nature, who would not wish to take life."

"Thank you. Now, will you please ask Mr. Winters to come here?"

Cunningham bowed courteously. "Dr. Dayland," he said, whimsically, "you should be a criminal lawyer."

"Mr. Cunningham," the girl flashed back, "you should be a judge."

As he walked away, the door opposite opened a crack. It was the entrance to the reception room of Fulton & Kent, where

Miss Greenwood had called to her undoing, and where Jenkins now guarded her in the private office of Mr. Fulton.

The broad shoulders of the bluecoat came out cautiously. He beheld Nancy and beckoned vehemently at her.

Wondering at the expression on the officer's face, she approached.

Jenkins leaned forward. "Come inside, please, Dr. Dayland," he whispered.

The lady in gray was hovering near his elbow where he had obviously commanded her to remain in his sight.

"What is it?" demanded Nancy hurriedly.

Jenkins cupped his mouth with a huge palm, although Miss Greenwood seemed to be paying no heed to him. He jerked his head toward the private office of Mr. Kent.

Mysteriously he whispered: "There's somebody hiding in that office there. I heard a stifled sneeze as I stood before the door between the two rooms."

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

WITH puckered brows Nancy glanced toward the sturdy office door labeled *Mr. Kent, Private.* No sound issued from behind the closed door.

A wave of vitriolic condemnation surged through her. What an unpardonable oversight she had been guilty of! She had acted like the veriest tyro, taking for granted that no one else had been concealed behind the closed doors. Yet when by chance, or as a warning, she had discovered Miss Greenwood, even that had not pricked her sense of caution into a search of the remaining rooms.

Whatever ignominious mistake she had made could not be rectified by eleventh-hour regrets. Action was now the only remaining antidote.

Swiftly she stepped to the corridor door and opened it slightly.

"Mr. Jenkins," she spoke over her shoulder in a low tone, "please step out in the corridor and tell Mr. Winters that I have changed my mind about interviewing him at present. Ask his patience and request that he return to his place on the settle. Then come back here instantly."

As Jenkins obeyed, Nancy saw that he was just in time to intercept Winters's tall, lank figure. The junior member of the old law firm was only a few steps from Mlle. Mignonne's waiting room.

The girl closed the door. Very thoughtfully she held her next move in abeyance until the uniformed man should return. The veiled Miss Greenwood sagged wearily in a chair. Not a sound interrupted the enforced pause.

Then the door opened and the big policeman stepped in noiselessly.

"Well?" he asked in a stage whisper, staring with narrowed lids at the shut door.

"The lady has no suspicion that another figure is in hiding in the next office?"

"She gave no sign," muttered the officer. "I myself wouldn't have heard the noise if I hadn't been standing backed against the closed connecting door between the two private offices."

A quick thought plunged through the girl's mind. Had Miss Ivy Greenwood forgotten the fact that the person with whom Mr. Kent had been closeted had not rushed through the waiting room as she quietly closed the door behind her retreat into the unoccupied office? Or had she failed to hear, in her hurried exit, accomplished in nick of time, that only one person had hastened out? Either supposition was possible.

Nancy's plan was not full-fledged.

"Go back into the private office with your charge. Station her in a chair which does not command a view of Mr. Kent's private office. Stand with your ear near the crack of the closed door. If possible, take this position without arousing attention. If I say 'Jenkins,' enter instantly, shutting the door behind you."

The door of Mr. Fulton's office clicked behind the officer and the veiled woman. Only a moment did Nancy pause that her bidding should be perfectly staged. Then she stepped noiselessly to the private office of Mr. Kent. Her swift fingers turned the knob and she slid in.

A middle-aged man came abruptly to his feet from a chair in the corner. He was

fastidiously dressed in smartly cut clothes. He still wore his overcoat. Tortoise-rimmed glasses perched on the bridge of his beak-like nose. A long silk cord ran to his ear and down to a buttonhole. His glistening bald head shone like a billiard ball. He was smooth-shaven, and his features were strongly marked. The sudden coming of the girl made him squint.

Again Nancy had a baffled sense that the face opposite was vaguely familiar. But she wasted no time on blurred memory.

"May I ask," she demanded sarcastically, "who you are?"

He watched her carefully. In the look recognition flooded his face. She knew that he had been more successful in his identification of her.

"I see that I need not warn you that your skulking, suspicious presence here places you in a highly equivocal light. You doubtless are aware also that I, in the pursuance of justice, cannot hold inviolate whatever you may say."

He nodded brusquely. "I know—let me introduced myself. I am an old client of Mr. Kent here on business of a most private nature."

"Evidently."

He flinched before the scorn in her voice.

"Your name?" she went on.

The tortoise-rimmed glasses fell from his nose with the sharp spasm which contorted his face.

"Amos Shoreham," he announced pragmatically.

"President of the Second National Bank," Nancy thought, "and—more extraordinary than all—the executor whom the dead Cavendish had named in his last will which now lay hardly dry in Mr. Cunningham's safe, even as its testator lay hardly cold in the office upstairs."

"You doubtless realize the unpleasantness of your position, Mr. Shoreham," she observed aloud.

"Indeed, I do," exploded the man irascibly. "I have been penned in here for hours—"

Nancy looked at her wrist watch. "It is now one thirty. Only an hour and a half has elapsed since you elected to wait here. We might as well begin at the outset and be very exact in our statements—Mr. Shoreham."

"Well, it seems a month. And I've got a mighty important engagement. Now that you've found me, may I go?"

"Not at all."

"Why not?" he snapped truculently.

"You have no intimation of what has occurred?"

"No. Kent went out in a hurry when he heard some one calling, and he has not come back yet."

"If your time is so highly precious, why didn't you hasten out after him, when he had been gone overlong? If your impatience is as great as you say, why hasn't it manifested itself in some way other than your waiting here?"

"Thunderation, miss! Didn't I tell you that Kent is putting through something mighty important, that he broke off in the midst of it, and I can't go until he has finished the business?"

"And you had no curiosity?"

"Of course not," he blustered. "Why should some commotion in the hall interest me when my mind is full of weighty affairs?"

"Did you hear the nature of the cry which took Mr. Kent from this room?"

"No."

"How did it happen that you could not translate the words which Mr. Kent so obviously did? You were both closeted here together with an equal opportunity to hear."

The pompous bank president flushed. "That is not so. I am slightly deaf. I was seated with my worst ear toward the corridor. I made nothing out of the noise."

"Then you know nothing of what has happened?"

"Certainly not. And I'm in a pretty kettle of fish, too, waiting here like a caged rat trying to make up my mind whether I should go or stay. Where is Kent, anyway? His conduct is infamous."

"Mr. Kent is retained."

"*Detained?*" thundered the man.

Nancy looked down quickly. Her ruse had worked. She had purposely dropped her voice on the first syllable of 'retained' to test the truth of Mr. Shoreham's slightly deaf plea. He had spoken the truth.

"Did you hear Mr. Kent hurriedly enter the next room?"

Of course Kent had made no such move, but Nancy was determined to learn if possible whether Shoreham had heard the entrances into the next room—was aware that any one had been there since Mr. Kent had left so precipitately.

"Kent return to the next room?" blustered the irate man. "Of course, I didn't hear him. Don't you suppose I'd have stepped to the door between and asked him what he meant by keeping me waiting? I'm not such a doddering idiot as that. And I can tell you that I'm not in the habit of being kept waiting."

Indignation covered his face—indignation and outraged dignity.

As Nancy regarded him it was borne home to her that, extraordinary as his conduct had first seemed, it looked highly probable that he was telling the truth. She glanced toward the big oak desk. Papers were scattered about, a fountain pen lay with its nib unprotected. The desk gave every appearance of an unexpected interruption and a hasty desertion of the business in hand.

Shoreham's eyes followed her glance. He made a quick movement as if to shield her searching eyes from the nature of the interrupted business. Steadily her clear gaze fell upon him. He paused abruptly.

"It seems rather odd, Mr. Shoreham, that in business of so highly important and secret a nature you sat calmly here while the documentary evidence of your purpose lay unprotected and in full view on Mr. Kent's desk."

"Not at all," rapped the man. "I've expected him back momentarily. People in the Temple Building, either inmates or clients, aren't in the habit of poking into private offices."

The truth of this remark was patent to Nancy. She took a tentative, tantalizing step nearer the documents on the desk.

Mr. Shoreham stepped up angrily. "See here, Dr. Dayland, I don't understand your business, nor why you are subjecting me, an old client of a reputable concern, and here on legitimate business, to such a cross-examination. But I must strictly forbid your meddling into my private affairs—particularly when Mr. Kent isn't here to prevent you."

"Were Mr. Kent here he could not prevent me."

"W-what's that? Why not?"

"Because," the girl stated flatly, "everything on this first floor, and all the property, is now under the strictest police surveillance."

"Police surveillance!" came the startled echo. "But why? I don't understand. Has Kent done anything?"

"Not to my knowledge, but some one has."

"Explain, please," he asked harshly.

"A man has just come to a violent death in the corridor of this building."

"Great Heavens!" Shoreham sat down suddenly. Perspiration dampened his brow. "What a confounded mess! W-why," he exclaimed, the full significance of the words finally piercing his consciousness, "why, you can even keep *me* here—"

"Precisely."

Shoreham's wide glance went as though magnetized to the paper-strewn desk.

Nancy translated the look. "Yes," she observed, "and the nature of your very secret business here may become police property. How long have you known Mr. Kent?"

"Ten years or so."

Nancy was leading up to a vital question. "You are known to the other firms on this floor?"

"Certainly, most of them have dealings with the Second National."

"Do the law firms of Case & Strong and Cunningham & Winters?"

"Yes, both."

"Do you know Mr. Cunningham well?"

Plainly perplexed at the seeming irrelevancy of these questions, he answered laconically, "Yes."

"Undoubtedly," remarked Nancy slowly; "you are likewise acquainted with an old client of Mr. Cunningham—Mr. Hugh Cavendish"

With a queer look filtering across his face which she could not explain, Shoreham returned, "Yes, I know him."

"Do you know him very well?"

"Very well indeed. He is an old friend."

"Is he a stockholder in your bank?"

"He is—as he is in several other banks."

"When did you last see Mr. Cavendish?"

"I don't see the bearing of your questions—"

"Answer, please."

"Cavendish called on a business matter at my bank office on yesterday morning."

"And the nature of this business?"

"He asked for a list of the most deserving charities."

"Was he a philanthropist?"

"Why—er—not exactly. He had some charities, I believe."

"He did not confide to you the reason for his request?"

"Certainly not. But won't you have done with your questions and let me go?"

"You have evidently forgotten that I said the building is under police surveillance—the building and those in it."

"But I know nothing about what has happened. Mr. Kent can easily swear to that. Certainly you won't detain me unless I can be held as a material witness."

"It won't be necessary to detain you longer, now, Mr. Shoreham, unless—"

"Well?" he asked sharply.

"Unless there is something highly suspicious about the nature of your business here—unless it seems to have some bearing on what has happened. I must examine these papers."

Shoreham popped up like a jack-in-the-box. But something in the expression of the girl's face caused him to sit down again resoundingly.

"It's an outrage," he said thickly.

"It is necessary. I must overlook nothing. If the papers have no bearing on the affair, you have my word of honor that their contents shall not go beyond me."

Somewhat mollified, he waited as she stooped over the document-laden desk. Alertly her eyes traveled over the strewn contents. Little vertical lines penciled themselves between her straight brows as she became cognizant of the nature of the business interrupted there.

For on the desk she beheld deeds of property transfer to the extent of ten thousand dollars, made out to one Ivette Mignonne. And the deeds of transfer in the medium's favor were made by Dorothy Cavendish!

CHAPTER X.

AT BAY.

THE amazing facts seared themselves upon her mind. Here was the president of the city's oldest and most reputable bank obviously acting as proxy for Dorothy Cavendish, the daughter of his dead friend.

And the man who had died so suddenly had only the day before named Amos Shoreham as executor in his will. This instantly presupposed the dead man's full confidence in his cited executor. Yet on the day that he died, at the very time and in the same building, this man is in mysterious cabal with Mr. Kent at the instigation of the girl whom Cavendish has just disinherited for some extraordinary reason.

And as the girl's aunt hovers in unannounced impatience in the Kent waiting room, highly important and mysterious deeds of transfer are in process behind the shut doors. Most incredible of all, the recipient of this considerable property is none other than the unknown medium, Mlle. Mignonne!

What was the significance of these deeds? What was the connection between disinherited Dorothy Cavendish and the strange mystic who had come so recently and so strangely to the impeccable old Temple Building? For connection there must be. How else could such an act be explained? Who and what was the mysterious Mlle. Mignonne, and how did her life cross and enter that of the Cavendish family?

Shoreham was reaching for his hat. "Now that you have presumed to acquaint yourself with the nature of these papers," he began stiffly, "perhaps you will let me go."

"I cannot."

"I don't understand you, Dr. Dayland. You just told me, gave me your word, that I could leave when your perusal proved my assertion that this confidential business cannot possibly interest you or the police."

"You are mistaken. They interest me tremendously. For the man who has just come to his untimely death in the corridor is the father of the girl whose secret business you are furthering—"

"W-what are you saying?" Shoreham was pale to the lips. "Hugh Cavendish dead!"

"Violently dead—under highly suspicious circumstances."

"Great God!" murmured the man.

A dead silence ensued. He seemed trying to grasp the bomblike statement as a fact. He kept moistening his lips.

"No wonder I was forgotten!" he observed dully. His mind began to clear again. "But terrible and incredible as this tragedy is, what has my business to do with the death of Hugh Cavendish?"

"Was your business known to Mr. Cavendish? Was he advised that Miss Dorothy was about to transfer some of the property inherited from her mother to a nameless medium?"

"Concerning that I do not know."

"What do you think?"

"I prefer not to say."

"When did Miss Dorothy set in motion this act?"

"Three days ago. She has always looked upon me as a sort of a great uncle. She came to me seeking for my secret help."

"Doesn't her very desire for secrecy seem to prove that her purported act was unknown to her father?"

"Perhaps."

"Did she give any reason for this move of hers?"

"None. I—I even presumed to inquire into her reason. But she perfunctorily froze the questions. She declared that she was of age—as she is—and that I had oftentimes told her that if I could be of any service to call on me. I am a man of my word. I was forced to act for her.

"I began to think that perhaps I could manage the affair more cautiously and more discriminatingly than some outsider. For she declared that she would go to some unknown lawyers and get them to act for her. That settled it."

"Did you arrange to come here this morning?"

"I did."

"When did you make your appointment?"

"The same morning when she was in my office, three days ago."

"Did Miss Dorothy plan to be here, too?"

"Why, of course." His voice was surprised. "Her signature would naturally be necessary on the deeds of transfer."

"What time was she to come?"

"Any time between eleven thirty and twelve."

"When did you arrive?"

"At eleven thirty."

"Was that the time of your appointment "

He nodded.

"Didn't you begin to think it was curious that Miss Dorothy hadn't put in an appearance?"

"Why, no. To tell the truth, I had forgotten all about it. That is, I didn't know but perhaps she had seen Mr. Kent come out and was talking with him somewhere, although I couldn't see why."

"So," mused Nancy, "Miss Dorothy Cavendish was to come here without fail to sign the papers."

"Certainly. Of course, I understand now why she hasn't come. What a dreadful shock awaited the poor girl here!"

Nancy ignored this remark. Instead she questioned, "Did the girl's aunt, Miss Greenwood, know that her niece intended to transfer some of her mother's property to this Mlle. Mignonne?"

"Miss Dorothy did not say so."

"What do you think?"

"I really could not say."

"Who is Mlle. Mignonne?"

"I have no idea." There was no denying the truth of these words.

"Then she is not a friend or an acquaintance of the family?"

"Certainly not! At least not to my knowledge." Scathing scorn was in the voice.

"She has never been to the house, or her affairs even remotely connected with those of the Cavendish's?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Don't you think it very strange that

Miss Dorothy was privately setting in motion such actions?"

"I do — most extraordinary. I told Dorothy so. But she paid no attention to me. I don't understand it at all—or Dorothy's connection with such a woman."

"This is all for the present," said Nancy. "I regret to say that you must remain here under surveillance for a while."

Quietly she stepped to the table, rolled up the documents, placed them in a deep desk drawer, turned the key in the lock. This she put in her little leather case.

"Mr. Shoreham," asked Nancy suddenly, "did you expect Miss Greenwood here?"

"Certainly not."

"You did not know that she was waiting in Mr. Kent's reception room while you were closeted with him here?"

Shoreham's jaw dropped. The act showed startled surprise. "I—I did not. Maybe she was bringing a message from Dorothy."

Ignoring this suggestion, Nancy inquired: "Did Mr. Kent expect Miss Greenwood?"

"Of course not. Mr. Kent is a gentleman. He wouldn't keep a lady waiting like that out in his reception room, provided she had had any appointment with him. It's not like Kent to make two appointments unless they are about the same thing."

"Suppose they were about the same thing?"

"Impossible. For had she come here on Dorothy's business, Kent would have known it, and there would be no reason to keep her waiting."

"That's so," acceded Nancy. "Therefore, you will not be surprised to learn who is detained in the next private office."

She stepped to the connecting door and opened it. "Jenkins," she commissioned, "you are to keep this door open until I instruct you further. You will remain in charge of these two people."

Nancy then left the offices abruptly. From the surprising developments of the last few moments a strong suspicion had been shaping itself in her mind. She ignored the rooms of Mlle. Mignonne. She was thoroughly acquainted with what they overtly held. So she stepped into the offices adjoining those she had just left, the offices of the dead man's attorneys, Messrs. Cunningham and Winters.

The first door opened into Mr. Winters's private office. A hasty glance about proved it to be empty. Directly behind this office was that of Mr. Cunningham labeled *Private.* Here, too, no further surprising figure came forth to view. She walked through the door connecting Mr. Cunningham's office with the long reception room flanking both offices and entered from them as well as by a single door on the corridor. The plain, substantially furnished room revealed no hiding guest.

Loring stood outside.

"Well, Miss Dayland," he said in a low voice, "the people are getting pretty hungry here—and out of sorts, too. Aren't you going to wind up this investigation of yours pretty soon?"

"I cannot say now," the girl confessed frankly.

This open admission of hers caused a shadow of scorn to fall across the face of the man from headquarters. In his code of conduct no one ever admits that he does not know. The less he knows, the more he pretends. He pigeonholed the girl investigator as an ingenuous imbecile whose luck in her spectacular cases had warped the chief's judgment.

"You might, Mr. Loring, send one officer with orders for food from any of the people on the settles here. There is a quick lunch restaurant in the next block. They may have whatever they want to eat—that is in reason and judgment."

Anger flamed across Loring's face. "Oh, they've got to wait if the police say so. Some of them are commuters. They are used to delays. It won't hurt them."

"No, but it is not necessary that they go without food if they desire it."

Without another word Nancy stepped into the private office of Mr. Case. These law offices were in reverse duplicate of those she had just left. She gave a cursory glance about, then turned the knob and stepped into the waiting room.

A slight, richly dressed girl stood up trembling as the door opened. She had a dark, delicate face, unusually lovely in con-

tour and coloring. The lips were quivering, and the eyes were swollen with weeping.

"Y-you're — you're Dr. Nancy Dayland," she began, "and I—I—" Her voice was choked with sobs.

Nancy gently helped her. "You're Dorothy Cavendish," she said quietly.

The girl nodded miserably. "I thought you would never come and help me."

"Then you knew I was here?"

"Yes. I heard your voice and some one addressed you by name."

"Then you must also know *why* I am here."

"Oh, I do, I do. And I've been frightened to death. I haven't known how to turn."

"Why?"

"Because my father did not know that I was coming here this morning on something quite private and of which he would not approve."

"Even so, when you learned what had happened, why didn't you hurry out?"

"Because I didn't want to be seen here. I—I'm not supposed to be here at all."

"Where are you supposed to be?"

"In Mr. Kent's office."

"Then why are you here?"

"I just slipped in here for a moment for —on—"

"Well?"

"I had a sudden idea. As I was ahead of my appointment, I—I thought I'd come here first."

"Did you come here directly you entered the building?"

"Yes."

"Did either Mr. Strong or Mr. Case expect you?"

"Oh, no. My idea came very suddenly."

"What was this idea?"

"Oh, please, I'd rather not say now."

"What time did you get here?"

"At twenty minutes of twelve."

"You are positive?"

"Yes, I looked at my watch. That's how I knew I was early for my appointment."

"Then you must have seen another person enter—some one who came at the same time."

The girl's face was white and startled. "You m-m-mean my father? But I didn't —I swear I didn't. I hadn't any idea he was coming here. I didn't know it until—the terrible thing happened."

She began to weep convulsively.

"No," enlightened Nancy, "I did not mean Mr. Cavendish. He did not come until later. I meant your aunt, Miss Greenwood."

Dorothy looked up quickly. "Oh, yes, Aunt Ivy came with me in a taxi."

"Where did she go?"

"To wait in Mr. Kent's reception room while I came here."

"Did your aunt know why you were coming to Mr. Kent's offices?"

"Of course. I asked her to come with me for my appointment."

"Neither Mr. Kent nor Mr. Shoreham knew that your aunt was coming with you?"

"How could they? I didn't tell them."

As Dorothy Cavendish bowed her head in a fresh paroxysm of grief, the top of her smart, embroidered hat was plainly visible. From its crown a heavily chased silver hatpin gleamed and scintillated in the light.

And behind it on the stiff satin crown an empty hatpin hole yawned accusingly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEXT OF KIN.

THE woman's weapon again! For a certainty it was relentlessly pointing its glistening finger at the women caught in the whirlpool of tragedy. The owner of the inescapable clew entered the pattern of the sinister affair. Beyond all doubt, the remaining pin in Dorothy Cavendish's hat was a duplicate of the one gripped in the hand of the dead man when Dr. Bainbridge extracted it.

Quite unexpectedly Nancy stepped to the door. She did not go out, nor even cross the threshold. She merely held the door ajar and peered out.

Before taking the body of the slain man to his office Dr. Bainbridge had been exceedingly careful in his preservation of every possible detail concerning it. The

doctor was a painstaking as well as a brilliant physician and surgeon. So he had very methodically marked in white chalk the exact position where Cavendish had lain on the wooden floor.

Now the gas jet lighted up the ghostly and ghastly white line which crudely suggested a human figure distorted and prostrate. Nancy fancied that, had she not seen what had lain there before it had been removed, the simple lines remaining to mark the presence of death would have told her all.

Quickly her eyes estimated the exact placement of those indicative white lines. She started suddenly. Why had the fact escaped her before? Were its many threads drawing cobwebs across her observation? For beyond doubt Hugh Cavendish's body had lain at a spot equidistant from four doors. Mentally she branded the position of these doors on her memory.

How extraordinary that the man had died approximately ten feet from these four doors! First came Mlle. Mignonne's to the room where she was in consultation with her unknown client; next Miss Ivy Greenwood had sat by her own testimony in a chair by the door of the Kent & Fulton reception room nearest to the body on that diagonal; next was the door of Mr. Winters's private office; and lastly the door from which she was now peering.

This fourth door, completing those nearest the fatal white-lined spot, was the one behind which Dorothy Cavendish herself had sat in grief and horror. And the sole entrance to the building, where had stood the suspicious acting Graham, also known as Slippy Gates, with a prison record, was more than twice that distance or about twenty-five feet.

Black doubt assailed the girl as she quietly shut the door behind her. The telltale pin hole still stood out a mute and inescapable reminder. Quite casually Nancy approached the girl's bent, tear-stained face.

"Haven't you dropped one of your hat pins?" she suggested, with nothing but the most commonplace expression in her voice.

Dully Dorothy Cavendish's right hand rose tremblingly to her hat, fumbled blindly, and came to a stop on the single remaining pinhead.

She raised her swollen eyes in surprise at the question. Then the hand went back dazedly to the rear of the hat. It groped about, but found nothing.

"Yes," she replied mechanically, as her hand fell back limply to her lap. "It seems to be gone."

Nancy stooped over and pretended to search the floor in the vicinity of the girl, although the lost hatpin was carefully secreted in a legal envelope inside her own gray leather case.

Somewhat wonderingly, Dorothy Cavendish's eyes followed her movements. Half dispassionately she, too, glanced about on the floor.

"Oh—oh, it doesn't matter." Her voice broke. "Nothing matters very much now."

Instantly Nancy desisted from her pseudo search. If Dorothy Cavendish were acting, she displayed a histrionic art unequalled by many world-renowned artists. Furthermore, instinctively the girl had reached for the front pin first. Didn't this show that she had no knowledge which pin had been lost? It might be that.

On the other hand, were the girl dissimulating, wouldn't her hand have gone directly to the empty hole where she knew it would find nothing? Wouldn't she then simulate an admirable surprise? Or would she have followed the course of procedure groped out by her trembling hand? Again thick doubt assailed Nancy. What a blind business it all was! And how inexorably were several persons already enmeshed in the tightening net.

"Why," she asked directly, "didn't you bring your aunt here?"

"I wanted her to be in Mr. Kent's reception room should he ask for me before I happened to get back. She could then tell him that I was really here, that there need be no halt."

"Did your aunt know why you had suddenly decided to come to this room?"

"Yes."

Instantly that reply brought back the doctrine of a certain famous French psycho analyst. His renowned postulate in

criminology ran: never overlook the evidence held back by those nearest to the tragedy or those affected by it! Miss Greenwood had carefully withheld all this information. Was she shielding herself, Dorothy Cavendish, or whom? Yet the old Frenchman emphasized the vital importance of such withheld testimony.

Nancy launched her next question with the suddenness of a pistol shot.

"Why had you an appointment with Mr. Kent and Mr. Shoreham to transfer some property inherited from your mother to Mlle. Ivette Mignonne, the medium?"

Dorothy Cavendish uttered a little gurgling gasp and cowered before Nancy's flashing eyes.

"You know that?" her pallid lips whispered.

"Yes. Why? You must answer."

"I cannot," wailed the girl.

"And why?"

"Because, oh, because—I—I am afraid to, now that my f-father d-died s-so—"

"You heard what he said?"

"Yes, oh, yes." A violent fit of trembling seized the girl.

"What did he mean?"

"I do not know." Yet in the girl's hunted eyes did Nancy see shadowed there the cloud of some dreadful suspicion?

"Then why can't you tell the reason for your attempted property transfer?"

"Because I cannot—I cannot. I am afraid—"

"Of what?"

"That it might look queer that if—if they should say my father could not have killed himself that—that some one else might appear guilty."

"So you think your father did not kill himself?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know," moaned the girl. "I can't believe it, despite what he said. It wasn't like him. He loved life above all things, and he has often said that any one who takes his life is a despicable coward."

"Can you think of any other explanation for his dying confession"

Undisguised fear looked from the girl's eyes. Twice she tried to speak, but no answer came. Then she only shook her head with dumb misery—and something else—stamped upon her face. Was it fear, or the spectral hand of some hidden suspicion?

"You never left this office from the time you entered it at twenty minutes of twelve until now?"

"No," she sobbed miserably.

"What time was your appointment with Mr. Kent?"

"Any time between eleven thirty and twelve."

"Why, when you had the correct time with you, did you wait here by your own testimony until twelve o'clock without attempting to go to Mr. Kent's office, where you knew you were due by appointment before twelve? You have already confessed that you were so afraid you might be tardy that you left your aunt there, supposedly to tell Mr. Kent where you were should he ask for you."

"Why, I—I—" stammered the girl, "I—I just couldn't give up seeing some one here first. So I just kept waiting, expecting every minute that Mr. Strong would be through with the man to whom he was speaking."

"If you were so very anxious both not to be late to your appointment with Mr. Kent and to see some member of this firm, why didn't you make your presence here known?"

"I—I didn't want to. I j-just couldn't seem to nerve myself to. I just kept hesitating and waiting until—until Billings began to pound and call for help. Then it was too late."

"Miss Cavendish, you are positive that you had two hatpins when you put on your hat?"

"Of course. But the pin doesn't matter."

Ignoring this remark, Nancy persisted. "Was your aunt with you when you put on your hat?"

"Yes."

"Did she know that you started out with two hatpins?"

"Y-yes," replied the girl wearily. "She knows, because I was slow in dressing. She was all ready. She held my coat for me. She handed me my two pins, saying that the wind was blowing a gale, and that I

had better have my hat fastened securely. I particularly remember starting both pins in their single holes. I am very careful about keeping the crown free from pin marks."

Again Nancy felt as if she were being stifled, buried in the extraordinary untied ends which kept cropping out.

"You would not have worn two pins if your aunt had not suggested it?"

The girl paused as though in thought.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she answered dispassionately. "But what ought I to do? And why are you talking so much about a mere hatpin as though its loss mattered vitally?"

Swiftly Nancy brought out a long envelope. From it her still gloved fingers flashed the lost hatpin before the staring eyes of the quivering girl.

"Why do I place so much stress on this lost pin? Because it was found tightly gripped in the hand of your dead father."

Uttering a little broken moan, Dorothy Cavendish crumpled into a senseless heap on the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT THE MATRON FOUND.

NANCY'S ministering fingers were soon rewarded by returning consciousness in the girl. When Dorothy Cavendish opened her fluttering lids the shining hatpin had gone back to concealment in the leather case. At first the girl looked about her weakly. Then realization began to creep across her twitching face.

"I am sorry," Nancy said gently. "The air is beastly here. Just as soon as you feel able, I will take you across the corridor to your aunt."

Somewhat pacified by the tones the girl stood up feebly. "It will be good to get out of this room, and to be with Aunt Ivy."

Then she paused irresolutely. "B-but all the people out in the corridor. They will see me, and they may recognize me."

"It will have to come sooner or later. You are in no condition to be left alone here."

"Can't we go home, away from this terrible building?" She shivered, and her face blanched again.

"Later, in a little while now," Nancy's voice soothed her. "But you will be with your aunt until then."

So the jaded and weary watchers and waiters in the corridor were treated to a belated and mild sensation. The door of the Case & Strong reception room opened. A slight, girlish figure with a dropped veil appeared, leaning on the arm of Nancy Dayland.

Mr. Strong started up from his settle. Then he sat down again with an expression of such deep surprise that his face looked positively idiotic. Mr. Kent seemed highly distressed. And of the two partners of her father's law firm, Mr. Cunningham appeared amazed, while his junior seemed mildly surprised.

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" murmured Loring to the officer beside him. "A mysterious lady cooped in the office here all the while. Now I guess the chief will be hopping when he realizes that his tight-fisted order for me to do nothing until Miss Dayland told me has ended in such a find. Just like a girl not to have the offices searched at once instead of giving orders that no one can enter, and that the men see that it is carried out."

"But," protested the policeman, "you yourself told us to guard the doors and to see that not a soul entered."

"Oh, you mind your business, Smith. You're getting altogether too officious. You don't suppose I've been acting without any orders, do you?"

The reprimanded man in uniform subsided into a sheepish silence. Then the door to the Fulton & Kent suite barred any further view of the two figures.

Without a word the girl's aunt took her to a chair, and gently stroked her wrists. They seemed to be in perfect accord and understanding, these two, and quite oblivious of those about them. With a quick nod at Jenkins, Nancy went swiftly back to Mlle. Mignonne's private office. Here the matron awaited her with the medium whom she had long finished searching.

But the faces of the two women were studies in contrasted expression. The po-

lice matron wore a plainly exultant look, while the delicate features of the clairvoyant were drawn and haggard. Her shoulders drooped and she seemed on the verge of collapse.

"There's nothing but this, but it's enough," observed the matron significantly.

She held out a crumpled piece of paper with a fold across it. "This was tucked away inside her bodice."

It was a good quality of stationery with the watermark of a popular bond, largely sold by department stores. It was a half sheet which had been torn quickly, if its ragged edge were any indication. Slowly Nancy opened the note.

Strangely enough she dreaded to look at what it held. For fight as she would, her interest and admiration had been piqued by Mlle. Mignonne, whoever or whatever she was, or whatever part she had played, or would play, in the tragedy.

Printed in rough letters, plainly disguised, the message ran:

> You are mad to stay here. You are bound to be discovered—if anything should fall through. You must leave at once before it is too late, and before anything happens which discloses your true identity and why you are here.

The last five words were underscored twice. There was nothing else in the message, no signature. But it was either far too much or too little.

Nancy turned to the matron. "Please take Margaret Seavers next."

As the matron went to summon her, Nancy stepped back into the room of the Buddha where she had first interviewed this surprising woman. Mlle. Mignonne followed.

"Who wrote this letter?" Nancy asked directly.

Steadily, unflinchingly, the woman shook her head.

"I cannot tell you."

"Why?"

"Because it would not be wise."

"You are afraid to incriminate some one?"

"I do not wish to cast suspicion upon an innocent person."

"You must know," observed Nancy soberly, "that this places you in a very unfortunate position."

"I do."

"I have felt all along that you knew Mr. Cavendish and his family. Do you deny this?"

"I neither deny nor admit anything."

"What does this message mean?"

"That, too, I must decline to answer."

"Why? You are only blackening your position by your silence."

"I would make it only more unbearable by answering your questions."

"How did you come to know Dorothy Cavendish?"

Mlle. Mignonne toyed with one of her big sleeves, as if weighing her words. "I have already stated that I shall not answer a question of that nature. Clever as you are, you can't trip me."

Nancy knew this. The woman before her was on her guard, her every sense alert, fighting to conceal whatever she knew. But what did she know?

Again Nancy saw in her mind's eye the white lines on the corridor floor, and their suggestive nearness to the room in which this woman had been closeted with a strange and as yet unnamed man. Had the two been in collusion? Had the supposed seance been merely a carefully prepared trap awaiting the coming of Hugh Cavendish?

Were the two working together? Then neither of their testimonies could be believed. But that would presuppose a knowledge of Hugh Cavendish's intended coming at that very time. So far no one had been found who expressed honestly or dishonestly any knowledge of his visit.

If the dead man were not coming to consult his lawyer or his physician, what was the significance of his hasty, unannounced trip to the Temple Building, which had resulted in his untimely and mysterious death?

Every way Nancy turned, she seemed to run into a cul-de-sac. What was causing the sun-spots on her vision?

Was it the multiple contradictions which kept increasing instead of lessening the number of possible opportunities for foul play from several doors? Admitting this,

the testimony of Billings, the chauffeur, and that of Slippy would have to be thrown out. For both these witnesses must have then seen some telltale hint from one of the suspicious doors. Could the chauffeur be lying. But why? Would he have any reason for concealing what he saw, had he seen anything?

The faces of Dorothy Cavendish and her aunt filmed across Nancy's mind. Either might be an answer, but what about the mysterious Mlle. Mignonne? What part did she play in the chauffeur's story? If he had seen her or a mysterious man shadowed by her door, why shouldn't he have said so? Besides, Billings had turned to Mlle. Mignonne's door and knocked loudly and blindly. Did that mean anything?

"Perhaps you will now tell me who you are," suggested Nancy. "For this letter and your obvious reluctance to mention the Cavendish family will force me to investigate you very carefully. You cannot escape the many-eyed vigilance of the police. In time they can ferret out anything. The true identity of a woman like you is an almost impossible thing to lose. And you are only making matters worse for yourself. Won't you tell me who you are?"

"I cannot."

"Did Dorothy Cavendish write this note?" asked Nancy suddenly.

Her ruse failed. Mlle Mignonne was too clever. Not the flicker of an expression answered.

"I have already told you that you cannot trap me into an admission or a denial."

"Of course you know," reminded Nancy, "that you will have to be detained as a suspect—that your every act will be watched?"

Soberly the woman nodded.

"At what time did Miss Dorothy Cavendish come to your office to-day?"

"She did not come."

"Did any one see the client who was consulting you enter your room at eleven thirty?"

"I do not know. I do not know—I cannot say."

"You did not leave your office between eleven thirty and twelve?"

"I did not."

"Did the one consulting you leave it at any moment during that time?"

"No, certainly not."

"Did you at any moment from eleven thirty to twelve open the door from your consulting room in to the corridor?"

"No, I did not."

"Did your client?"

"Certainly not."

"Then it was not opened at all until the Cavendish chauffeur knocked loudly upon it?"

"No."

A little tapping came on the door, as if to illustrate audibly the question just set in motion. It was like some ghostly echo of the thunderous knocks which had sounded the prelude to the mystery. Nancy started suddenly, then checked herself.

Dr. Bainbridge stood on the threshold when she opened the door.

"A word with you, Dr. Dayland."

Nancy stepped out and shut the door.

"Dr. Dayland," he began directly, "we have made a careful examination of the clothing and the wound. It has been more or less of a superficial character since our most microscopic study of it cannot tell us for a certainty to what depth the blow was struck or from the exact angle. Another thing, Dr. Dayland, a very queer point in our judgment—"

"Yes?"

"Upon washing away the blood which had clotted there, and studying the hole in the epidermis it seems much larger than it ought to be."

"Ah," breathed Nancy, "you mean its diameter seems inexplicably large for the hatpin to have made?"

"Exactly. Of course, the pin may have been sort of twisted about in the pulling of it out, thereby enlarging the size of the wound. But I am not at all satisfied with this theory. We must have an autopsy, both to establish this point beyond doubt, and to prove whether or not Hugh Cavendish's right hand could have dealt the blow. A post-mortem examination of the heart is the only thing which can answer these questions."

"What steps must you take?"

"Merely perfunctory ones. The permission of the next of kin must be given. Although in the case of doubt as to how death actually resulted, this permission must be given."

"Miss Cavendish and her aunt are in the Fulton private office."

"Ah, have they been summoned? I tried to get the house, but no one answered."

Discretion made Nancy answer merely: "They are here."

Dr. Bainbridge stepped toward the offices where Dorothy Cavendish and Miss Greenwood were held.

Instead of going back to Mlle. Mignonne, Nancy entered the adjoining room where the matron had been searching Margaret Seavers.

"I don't know whether it means anything or not," began the matron. "But this was tucked away in her blouse."

She held a little handkerchief toward Nancy. As the girl took it she saw a few spots of blood on one corner.

"She says," the matron went on, "that she cut her finger this morning when sharpening a pencil. The first finger of her left hand is cut and bound with a little strip of surgeon's plaster."

"Let me see the cut," suggested Nancy.

CHAPTER XIII.

STALKING SHADOWS.

UNDER the strip of binding tape a small cutaneous cut appeared. Nancy's microscopic examination told her that the wound was of recent origin—that is, it might easily have been made that morning.

"With what were you sharpening your pencil?"

"A small penknife of my own. Mr. Cunningham is somewhat old-fashioned. The offices are without a modern, automatic pencil sharpener."

Abstractedly Nancy stood for a moment. Then: "Where is this knife?"

"It is in the top right drawer of my desk."

From her little leather folio Nancy brought out a notebook with perforated pages and a fountain pen. She hurriedly scrawled a few lines and signed her name. She handed the note to the matron immediately.

"Take this permit to the officer guarding the Cunningham & Winters's offices. It will admit you. Bring back Miss Seavers's penknife."

Without comment Nancy waited. The multiplicity of momentary new developments seemed to be crowding down upon her from everywhere. Mlle. Mignonne still waited in the next room.

Obviously, Nancy must see that the witnesses left the building as soon as they were searched and she was satisfied with the result and her questions for the present. The dismissal of the suspects until further examination would preclude any possibility of guilty evidence being returned to them surreptitiously from any accomplice on the settles.

Were any two people there working together it would be, indeed, a simple matter to evade justice by returning to the searched person any evidence temporarily hidden for the occasion of the personal search. Any one might cleverly see at once an opportunity for concealment in the clothes of the person already searched, and, therefore, free from further personal investigation.

Dr. Bainbridge returned.

As soon as Nancy answered his knock, he said, "Permission has been given at once. They didn't even protest. But, Dr. Dayland, what's the bluecoat doing in there?"

In a few words Nancy appraised him of the facts.

"It's a bad business," he observed soberly. "I'm sorry they are here under such circumstances."

"Let me know the moment you are ready to report on the result of your post-mortem, Dr. Bainbridge. I feel that it is going to be important."

"So do I," prophesied the doctor. "I'll advise you at once. Then there will be other things I wish to discuss with you also."

He hastened away to his gruesome task.

Exits and entrances seemed to be running through her investigations with clocklike regularity. The matron now returned. Her large hand held out a small, two-bladed penknife. Its larger blade was slightly under a quarter of an inch in width and an inch and a half long. The smaller blade was slightly narrower and about an inch in length. Both were sharply pointed. Nancy ran her thumb along the edges. They were razorlike.

Answering this discovery, Margaret Seavers explained directly, "Mr. Cunningham keeps them sharp for me."

Thoughtfully Nancy deposited the new bit of possible evidence in her leather case.

"Why are you keeping it?" demanded the girl, her eyes widening with a sudden thought. "Surely you're not supposing—"

"I am supposing nothing. It is merely wise to keep anything even remotely connected with my search. Now," she went on briskly, "if you will give me your address, the matron will bring you wraps for you and take you to the door. You understand," she said, addressing the matron, "that her hat and coat are to be searched thoroughly."

"Certainly."

"And," continued Nancy, "she is to take away with her only her hat, coat, and pocketbook. Gloves, rubbers and whatever else she has must be left here."

As the rain had ceased this order was not as autocratic as it seemed. Besides, Nancy had a very definite purpose in mind when she gave this order.

Nothing new was discovered in the girl's outer clothing, and she was soon dismissed. Upon the matron's return Nancy laid before her the wraps of Mlle. Mignonne, which a carved cabinet had disclosed. She herself summoned a plainclothes man who shortly left the building.

The medium was obviously greatly astonished that she was to be allowed to go home. At the same time her vast relief was unmistakable.

"You are not," Nancy told her in parting, "to leave the address you gave me at any time to-morrow. You must be where I can find you if further questions are necessary."

"I shall not run away," averred Mlle. Mignonne proudly.

Then she, too, went on her escorted way.

"Come now with me," suggested Nancy to the matron awaiting her next bidding.

The two walked across the corridor to the Fulton & Kent offices. Nancy murmured a few low words to Jenkins. Obediently he bowed, stepped into the room where Mr. Shoreham was still incarcerated, and closed the door. As he began his search of the highly indignant bank president, the police matron in the next room was performing the same service on the person of Miss Ivy Greenwood.

In the meantime Nancy sat in the reception room with the shrinking Dorothy Cavendish. The girl was too spent with grief and fear to voice any objections. She merely sat, dumbly miserable, awaiting her turn for the highly distasteful ordeal. Had she noted Nancy's dark eyes she would have beheld pity and understanding there.

For the girl investigator knew at once how the thing must breathe indignity to the sensitive girl. But she must be adamant to sentimental pity. Whatever lay before her in the darkening shadows surrounding the violent taking-off of Hugh Cavendish must not in any way be bungled at the outset. She had been almost immediately on the scene of the tragedy. It behooved her to see that nothing, however trivial, was overlooked.

The police matron appeared on the threshold. She shook her head. "Nothing," she announced.

Then in accordance with previous instructions she merely changed subjects with Nancy. So, as the girl waited in the anteroom with the freshly searched aunt, the matron was closeted with Dorothy Cavendish.

"Miss Greenwood," queried Nancy, seizing upon the opportunity for a few additional questions, "how many hatpins did Miss Dorothy start out with this morning?"

"Two."

"You are positive?"

She was. Moreover, her reasons and her testimony corroborated what Dorothy had stated to Nancy. Neither of the two wom-

en had had time to hatch up such a story, for the redoubtable Jenkins had been guarding them ever since they had been together. Of course, however, there remained the possibility that the two had previously arranged upon the story at the very outset.

So Nancy was as much at sea as ever regarding definite proofs concerning the hatpin.

Logical reasoning pointed to an equal array of facts for her, if innocent, and against her, if guilty.

Jenkins now declared tersely from the Kent private office: "Nothing at all, Dr. Dayland."

Then in accordance with his whispered instructions the officer accompanied the highly resentful Shoreham to the outer door.

Again the police matron announced no clews. At last the next of kin of the dead man were permitted to call a taxi and leave the grim building with its somber shadows and its growing mystery in which they were destined to play no little part.

With a sigh of relief that she was now making some slight progress in eliminating her question-and-search suspects until further notice, Nancy returned to the medium's gold and black room. She had already dismissed the efficient matron with a few appreciative words. And she had decided that Jenkins should use the medium's consulting room in the same capacity for his search of the men. Things would now go on without so many interruptions.

Before interviewing the long-delayed Winters, Nancy realized at once the necessity of cross-questioning the unnamed man of the horoscope seeking. When summoned, he declared that his name was Benjamin Rollins, that he was a grocer at 129 Cleever Street, and that he had been in business there for ten years.

He was just an honest, plain spoken man, he was, who conducted his business, paid his bills, and minded his own affairs. Nobody could say a word against him, Benjamin Rollins.

Why had he come to consult a medium? Well, there wasn't anything criminal in that. Better people than him believed in the stars! He wanted to find out whether a certain business deal he was considering seemed safe and worth while.

Questioned as to the nature of this deal, Rollins declared frankly that he was thinking of buying shares in Mexican oil. His testimony otherwise corroborated everything that Mlle. Mignonne had said.

Very thoughtfully Nancy passed him through to Jenkins, who had just reported nothing suspicious on Mr. Cunningham. With her consent he now accompanied the latter to the door after bringing his wraps. Somehow, she gave an inward sigh of relief when these personal searchers revealed no fresh evidence. The case was altogether complicated enough without the momentary addition of new and perplexing things.

As for Rollins, his story could either be straightforward, or cleverly rehearsed to appear aboveboard. Certainly if the man were a deep-dyed one, working carefully with the mysterious Mlle. Mignonne, he would give just such a story by previous arrangement. Mlle. Mignonne had already proved herself quite clever enough to have roped in just such a seemingly commonplace and respectable person.

Rollins had already shown that he was anxious for money. Perhaps his desired fortune from Mexican oil wells had already been realized, not from the portent of the stars, but from the star reader in the form of a substantial bribe. The thing was possible.

For Mlle. Mignonne was, beyond doubt, bound up with the Cavendishes. Had her sudden leasing of rooms in the building, in so highly mysterious a way, been part of a far-sighted, deep-laid plan? It was self-evident that the woman wasn't what she pretended, that the business of necromancy and mysticism was only the merest cloak. For what? The woman had money. Everything in the room breathed it. And money would buy much—even unto silence and the taking of lives.

But motive? — motive? — kept running through Nancy's mind. Sooner or later she knew that she would unearth the spot where the mysterious medium's life became tangential to the lives of the Cavendish family. Even had the mystic been without material

means of her own, some one else might be furnishing the money. Again the strange and inexplicable transfer of property sacredly inherited by Dorothy Cavendish from her dead mother, limned across her thoughts. What vitally pressing and imperative thing had caused the girl to attempt the transfer of such a bequest?

Sighing deeply, Nancy at last turned to the summoned Kent. She was now striving to tie up the business and occupants of each office and bundle them out bodily, clearing the way for further vital investigations.

"Mr. Kent," she began, "do you know why Miss Cavendish wished to transfer her mother's property to this Mlle. Mignonne?"

"Certainly not."

"Was Mr. Shoreham with you from the time of his arrival at eleven thirty until you left him in your office, when you hurried out upon hearing the chauffeur's cry for help?"

"He was."

"Were you expecting Miss Dorothy Cavendish?"

"Naturally, her signature was necessary."

"At what time was she to come?"

"At her convenience between eleven thirty and twelve."

"Were you expecting any one else at that time?"

"No. Naturally I do not make two appointments for the same time."

"Why didn't Mr. Shoreham rush out with you when you heard the cry for help?"

"I didn't ask him. But I presume, since he is a very cautious man, that he shrank from any unnecessary publicity."

"Was the reception room in darkness when you hurried through it in response to the cries?"

Mr. Kent appeared to think. "Why, yes," he replied in surprise. "I hadn't recalled it before, but it certainly was. I remember because I hit my shin sharply."

"Was your waiting room unlighted when Mr. Shoreham arrived?"

"It was not, nor when he entered my office. I was expecting Miss Dorothy momentarily. My reception room would not be without lights with her coming."

"Where was Mr. Fulton?"

"He left just before Mr. Shoreham's arrival at eleven thirty."

"Have you a secretary?"

"Yes, but she has been out for three days with a severe cold, which has left us badly handicapped."

"Mr. Kent, when you plunged through your darkened waiting room you saw nothing of any one that was waiting or lurking there?"

The question appeared to startle Mr. Kent. "Certainly not. "Ah!" he breathed as an idea flashed into his mind. "So that was where the extra veiled woman was, whom the matron just escorted to the door with Miss Dorothy!"

Nancy did not reply. Her silence was broken by the knocking Jenkins. As she stepped alertly to the door, he shook his head vigorously. The grocer already wore his hat and coat preparatory to dismissal.

Again, as one door closed on a witness, another opened, this time to admit the rat-faced, self-styled Joseph Graham, alias Slippy Gates, whom M. Renaud had identified as a prison bird.

This shabbily dressed individual, caught almost on the rebound by the swooping hand of Denby, was wizened and unhealthy looking. The prison pallor still sponged all traces of color from his face. His bullet-shaped head was closely cropped and his weasel-like face was weak rather than vicious. Nancy studied him thoughtfully.

Slippy Gates watched her sharply, consternation and surprise racing over his features. Obviously he, too, had been thunderstruck by the manner of girl the famous Nancy Dayland proved to be on close view. He squared his narrow shoulders and held up a defiant head.

A little smile quivered over Nancy's lips, to die away instantly. She read the actions as truly as if they had been deciphered for her. Slippy Gates had set her down as a mere girl, not of the underworld, and therefore unable to fight him with his own weapons, to cope with his ratlike cupidity.

"Terrence Gates," she began, "what have you against the slain Hugh Cavendish?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Head Chopper

By E. K. MEANS

FINANCIALLY speaking, three Tickfall friends were picking the coverlid. Cotton had slumped, times were hard, jobs were scarce, the white folks were feeling poor, and the three comrades were woefully lamenting that they had ever been born to die of starvation.

"Times is so hard, people is stopped gittin' buried," Pap Curtain, the grave digger mourned.

"Dey done stopped eatin' at de resteraw, too," Shin Bone, the proprietor of a hot-cat stand, sighed. "When times is good, niggers lives on beefsteak, when times is hard dey eats brisket, but when times is like dey is now, dey lives on de mem'ry of how good eats is."

"Peoples ain't lookin' fer no loose nigger to gib him a chance job," Figger Bush, man of all work, lamented.

Despite their gloom, the three still had a place to sleep. Up to this time they had not been deprived of three meals a day, for they humbly besought sustenance at the kitchen doors where their lady friends cooked, and were supplied with contemptuous magnanimity with "some hot biscuits an' a few sirup." But money was totally lacking, and their wearing apparel had been reduced to the minimum permitted by law. Each man had a ragged shirt, a pair of patched overalls, and a pair of worn shoes —that was all. Children of the sun do not need a hat except when it rains.

The three stood upon a sandbar on the shore of the Mississippi. They stepped out of their shoes, took off their shirts and overalls, and waded into the river, carrying their garments with them. With one thin cake of soap among them, they proceeded to wash their tattered clothes. This was laundry day.

"Don't waste none of dat soap on yo' skins, niggers," Figger Bush warned them. "I swiped dat soap from de hotel fer our clothes. Scour yo' hides off wid sand."

After a while they brought their garments out of the water and spread them out upon the scorching hot beach to dry. They sought a shady spot for themselves and stretched out to wait. In half a minute the voracious mosquitoes had found

them and every man began scratching a hole in the sand with his hands. Dropping down into this hole, he covered his body up to his neck, and remained there, waiting for his clothes to dry. They presented a curious sight, nothing visible but their heads, looking like something out of the side show at a circus. To this extreme had necessity reduced them.

When, an hour later, they were dressed and ready to return to Tickfall, a man emerged from the willows near the river bank and advanced rapidly toward them. He was small in stature, wonderfully round and fat, with two little piglike eyes gleaming selfishly in his moon shaped face, and over his strong white teeth there played constantly a slick, oily, good-natured smile. Under his arm he carried a large, heavy, clumsy book.

"Bless Gawd, fellers!" he exclaimed in oily intonations, as he stopped, placed his cumbersome volume upon the sand at his feet and mopped the perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his coat. "I's powerful glad to meet up wid you-alls. Dis here Mississippi is a gosh-awful lonesome river. My name is Jim Golly."

"Glad to meet yo' 'quaintance," Figger Bush announced, eying him curiously. "Whut did you say yo' bizzness mought be?"

"I ain't said up to yit," Jim Golly answered with his fat, slick smile. "But I ain't tryin' to hide nothin' from nobody. I'm got a book."

He slipped the toe of his patent leather shoe between the pages of the volume and thrust the book open. The negroes looked down upon the pages of a tailor's book of clothing samples. Selecting the material from these samples, many men order their suits of clothes from agents and have the garments made up in the large tailoring establishments of some city.

"I sells clothes!" Jim Golly proclaimed.

"You done made a water haul befo' you wets yo' seine, Brudder Golly," Pap Curtain snarled. "Ef whole suits wus two-bits per each, all three of us niggers couldn't buy one of dem scrap rags outen dat book!"

"Dat's too bad," Jim Golly sympathized. "I'm sorry you is all so awful onfinancial."

"Yes, suh, we is," Figger Bush assured him. "Each of us is deducted down to de clothes we is got on us now."

"How come?" Jim Golly asked.

"Times 'pears like is harder dan dey ever is been," they told him.

"But, it 'pears to me like you oughter hab some ole clothes to wear, excusin' dem suits," Jim protested.

"I had bad luck wid my one good suit," Shin Bone mourned. "I wus pressin' my pants wid a hot iron, an' a nigger frien' axed me out to hab a little dram of cawn shuck licker, an' I lef' de hot iron settin' on my pants an' burnt de leg off."

"I had wusser luck dan dat," Figger Bush sighed. "I went courtin' anodder nigger man's wife. I didn't know she wus married at de time, because she didn't make no mention of a husbunt parked somewhar, but I found it out a plenty when her husbunt showed up. Dat coon wus plum' onreasonable. He shot at me five times an' throwed rocks half an hour an' cussed scand'lous. He oughter been churched! I jumped a bob wire fence an' didn't jump high enough an' wus lef' a bobtail wreck! I felt like dat dyin' man when de dorctor tole him dat his end wus in sight."

"Huh!" Pap Curtain grunted. "I had de wussest luck of all. I wus coonin' a log acrost de Dorfoche Bayou dressed wid my best suit on, gwine to a lodge fun'ral. Fell offen dat log an' wet my clothes. I wanted to dry 'em real quick so I could mosey on to de buryin', so I hung 'em on a low lim' of a tree an' built a fire under 'em. I drapped off to sleep an' when I woked up, two arms of my coat wus hangin' on de lim', an' two legs of my pants wus hangin' beside 'em, but all de rest wus plum' burnt away. I laid off in de woods all day an' snuck home to my cabin at night in my shirt-tail."

"I'm proud you-all is so teetotally outen clothes," Jim Golly laughed. "I'm sellin' suits an' you buys one offen me."

"Ef our credick is good, I'll shore buy me a whole trooso," Figger Bush assured him.

"I moves we amend our motion an' git gwine to'des Tickfall," Jim suggested. "I'll explain my bizzness as we mopes along an'

atter we gits dar. I ain't givin' nothin' to nobody an' nobody's credick ain't wuckin', but I promises dat eve'y cullud brudder wears one of my suits when he hears whut I offers."

They walked slowly back to town. Whippoorwills called in the woods with such similarity of tone that they seemed to be followed for miles by just one vociferous bird. A black wolf galloped out of the marsh grass and came toward them with the easy familiarity of a dog, then sniffed contemptuously, leaped a pool of water and barked at them from a distant knoll as they passed. A buzzard floundered awkwardly along a woodsy path, bobbing its ugly red head, and rose clumsily upon its wings—indicating where the wolf had made a kill. All of which was the occasion of heap big talk among the four colored people.

When they arrived, Tickfall had drowsed in the sun for hours. A little incident woke it up. A sleeping negro in a buggy drove a sleepy mule down the street to where a sleeping cow dozed in the center of Tickfall's main thoroughfare. The front wheel of the buggy passed over the cow's rump. The cow woke up and got up—rump first—the buggy tipped and the negro fell out and went down—the same way.

The buggy turned over. The mule stopped. Then the mule looked around and saw the shape the buggy was in. He had never seen a thing like that hitched to him before, so with a bawl of fright he ran away from there. Several sleeping animals, aroused by the shouting and the tumult, broke loose from their hitching posts and started after the runaway.

At the moment of greatest excitement, a giant negro, black as coal-tar, stood in an empty farm wagon and drove two young mules out of an alley into the highway down which the frightened animals were running. One hand held the lines; with the other, he had rolled a cigarette and was just raising it to his lips to wet the paper with his tongue. His nervous young mules felt the urge to flight in the general panic. Their young feet beat a resounding tattoo upon the dirt road. But the giant black was undisturbed. He held the quivering animals in their tracks by the grip of his mighty arm upon the lines, and with a sliding motion of his left hand, licked the paper of his cigarette.

"Oh, you, Hitchie!" Figger Bush whooped admiringly. "You is de big ripe blackberry of Tickfall!"

The driver bowed his acknowledgment of the adulation, placed his cigarette between his lips, flicked the head of a match into flame with his thumbnail, and drove on, followed by a thin gray trail of smoke.

"Who in de name of mud is dat?" Jim Golly demanded.

"Dat's Hitch Diamond," Pap Curtain told him. "He's gran' exalted Head Chopper of de Nights of Darkness lodge."

II.

"BRUDDERS, I offers de goodest bargain in clothes dat ever wus knowed in Tickfall," Jim Golly announced smoothly as he faced the assembled members of the Nights of Darkness lodge. "I axes you to answer me dis question: kin you buy a whole suit fer fo' dollars an' fo' bits in any sto' in dis town?"

"Naw, suh!"

"Dat's whar I shines wid my bargain," Golly smiled. "Fer de mere an' simple sum of fo' dollars an' fifty cents, I rigs you out wid a plum' new suit apiece fer each so dat yo' lodge kin hab a proper regalia."

With a dramatic gesture, he opened his big book of samples and holding it so that it rested upon the table and was visible to the crowd of men, he said:

"I now invites you to perspect dese here samples, seleck yo' favoryte colors, an' gib me yo' measures."

"Gib us a leetle mo' talk about de money prices," Skeeter Butts requested.

"De terms is simple," Jim Golley replied. "You selecks de kind of clothes you wants. You bestows me wid de sum of two dollars per each. You gives me yo' measures, so I'll know yo' shape an' you' size. I sends de ordah to Saint Louee wid de fust payment of two dollars per each. When de clothes comes, I delivers 'em out, collecks two dollars an' fifty cents per member, an' eve'body gits satisfaction."

"I moves we takes him up," Figger Bush

said. "Gawd knows I needs a cheap suit. I'm mighty nigh down to my las' rag."

"Brudders, I been thinkin' 'bout how our clothes oughter look," the reverend Vinegar Atts, president of the lodge, remarked. "I suggests dat we ordah white pants, a yeller vest, an' a light blue coat wid a red collar!"

"Naw! My good gawsh, naw!" Pap Curtain howled, springing to his feet. "Dat'll make us look like Affikin noodle birds. I wants a suit I kin wear eve'y day 'thout lookin' like de lightning got drunk an' struck de rainbow! I needs reg'ler clothes!"

"Me, too!" Shin Bone squeaked. "Dem sky-muckle-dun-cullud clothes is all right when us is feelin' rich an' wants to monkey aroun', but hard times is done come back in style an' us po' niggers is mighty nigh rejuiced to dem fig leafs in de Gyarden of Edom."

"Le's all git us a decent black suit," Mustard Prophet proposed sensibly.

"How would us all look gwine to a lodge brudder's fun'ral wid white pants, a yeller vest, an' blue coat wid a red collar? Us don't want to look no bigger monkey dan we is nachel-bawned."

"Dat's de notion," Skeeter Butts applauded. "You black niggers put on a black suit an' come out on a black night to de Nights of Darkness lodge, an' ef you shets yo' eyes, a high-yaller cullud coon like me cain't see you! You jes' look like a blacked black spot in de black blackness. Den us will eleck a gran' exalted bootblack to black all our boots black—"

"Looky here, Skeeter Butts!" Vinegar Atts bawled in irate tones. "Us is got enough of yo' high-brow biggety talk. De nex' time you busts into de reg-lar bizzness of dis lodge, I'll app'int a gran' exalted eye-black to black yo' two black eyes an' make 'em a little blacker."

"Eve'body wants to black somebody! I moves dat black be our color!" Figger Bush barked.

The motion was carried with a whoop.

"Now, brudders, I ax you-alls fer yo' name an' two dollars per each," Jim Golly announced. "Us got to send a little advamce payment as evidence of good faith."

One hundred men marched up and covered the table top with small coins. Money was scarce with all of them and the few dimes and nickels that came up from the depths of cavernous pockets were eloquent of poverty and need. Laboriously they counted; slowly their count was verified. Then they gave their names and went back to their seats.

"Now, brudders, I got to know de measure of yo' size, so dese black suits will fit," Jim announced.

"Ef you got to measure all of us, it 'll take a year," Skeeter Butts wailed, forgetful of the president's black threats if again he broke silence. "Excusin' dat, you cain't measure de revun Vinegar Atts. He's too durn fat—you got to *survey* him."

"You all wears han'-me-down clothes, Golly replied. "Jes' gimme de figgers dat you always ax fer in de sto', an' us will make de alterations when de suits come—I'm a dandy tailor myse'f."

After considerable annoyance and delay, this detail was finished and the task of the evening was over for Jim Golly. He was feeling fine. Two hundred dollars was lying on the table before him and his fingers itched for the possession of it. Then he got the surprise of his life.

Pap Curtain arose and stepped out to the middle of the floor. Facing the president of the lodge, Pap placed his left hand, palm inward, upon the center of his forehead, then placed his right hand, palm outward, on top of the left.

In response, Vinegar Atts arose, and stretched out both arms wide from the shoulder and flapped them like a fat goose trying to fly.

Then Pap Curtain exclaimed in dramatic tones:

"Exalted presidunt, I calls for de gran' exalted Head Chopper."

Instantly, Hitch Diamond arose and walked into an anteroom. A moment later he appeared, carrying an old-fashioned battle-ax. The handle was six feet long, with an iron-ridged handpiece, reinforced by a leather wristband to keep it from slipping from the warrior's hand. The curved blade, the crescent a foot and a half long, was as sharp as a razor, and beyond the blade

was a long point, bayonet-shaped, ground to a needle-prick of sharpness.

Hitch Diamond, six feet four inches tall, black as coal-tar, with shoulders like a pair of walking beams and legs like the columns of a temple, a face battered and scarred from many bloody fistic battles where men fought with naked fists on the wharf-boats of the Mississippi, stood at attention with this mighty weapon of ancient warfare gripped in his giant paw. The antiquarian would have seen in him the perfect pattern of the Carthaginian warriors that Hannibal led to the Alps and who made affrighted Rome cower behind the protecting shelter of her walls and pray to all the gods they knew.

"Gran' exalted presidunt," Pap Curtain said, and in his snarly voice there was a note of plaintive humility, "times is hard an' I is poor. My two dollars lays upon dat table an' I begged from house to house an' axed all my white frien's to loant me whut dey could affode because I needs new clothes so bad. I ax de pertection of de Head Chopper."

"Amen! So mought it be!" A chorus of voices resounded in the room.

"Head Chopper, advamce an' receive yo' ordahs!" Vinegar Atts bawled.

Hitch Diamond advanced and stood close beside the president's chair and within a foot of where Jim Golly sat. He let the ax-helve slip downward through his hand until the weapon stuck upon its bayonet point in the floor within an inch of Jim Golly's foot. There the dreadful weapon stood alone, upright, quivering like a thing alive. Jim Golly performed certain physical contortions suggesting to an observer that he was trying to put his imperiled foot in his pants' pocket.

Vinegar Atts turned impressively to Jim Golly and intoned these words:

"Brudder Jim Golly, you has beseeched de funds of de members of dis lodge fer a great an' noble puppus. Each an' eve'y one of us is gib our little bit to dat cause. But you is not one of our lodge brudders, an' we aint never seed yo' favor or yo' face befo'. Us don't trust nobody like dat, an' so I app'ints de gran' official Head Chopper of dis lodge to be yo' gyardeen, as long as our money remains in yo' hands, an' ontil our lodge suits is duly delivered unto us."

"Amen! So mought it be!" the lodge answered.

"I don't se how dat kin be," Jim Golly protested, showing the whites of his little piggish eyes and trembling with nervousness. "You see, I got to send dis money away—"

"Restrain yo' conversation, brudder," Vinegar Atts admonished him. "Us will instruck you in yo' duties atter while!"

Then turning to Hitch Diamond, Vinegar intoned:

"Exalted Head Chopper, I charges you to gyard de funds of dis lodge as a sacred trust. Us is poor an' cain't affode to lose our dollars. You is now de official gyardeen of dis here Jim Golly, an' ef you lets him escape away, yo' life shall be fer his life!"

"Not on yo' life!" Hitch Diamond rumbled, glaring at the little fat tailor's agent as if longing for the glorious privilege of decapitating him, while Golly cowered before him with a fear that made his teeth rattle in his head.

Then Vinegar turned to Golly and said:

"Brudder Jim Golly, dis here money will be kep' in trust by de Head Chopper ontwell you is ready to send it off. De Chopper will den go wid you to de bank an' he'p you send it to de fellers whut makes our suits."

"Dat suits me," Jim responded feebly, which it veritably did not; but there was nothing else to say.

"While de Head Chopper attends you, I advices you to walk in de straight an' narrer path," Vinegar concluded. "De lodge am now adjourned!"

III.

THE next morning, Jim Golly entered the Hen-scratch saloon and sat down at a little table. Since his experience the night before, he had a creepy feeling and could not avoid taking furtive glances about him as if expecting a monstrous black to emerge from nowhere and chop his head off.

Skeeter Butts, proprietor of the little

saloon, came over and sat down at the table beside the stranger. Skeeter was a dapper little fellow, dressy as a dancing master, possessed of exceptional conversational gifts, and an imagination which fed upon itself and found its sustenance inexhaustible. Today Skeeter was feeling imaginative and his remarks were likely to be extraordinary.

"Who is dis here Hitch Diamond dat dey 'p'inted to poleece me?" Jim Golly wanted to know, a slight shiver passing through his rolls of physical fat.

"I don't know him so awful good," Skeeter answered promptly, "an' I ain't know fer sure who he is. Fer ninstunce, he looks like a nigger dat could preach a sermont, an' he looks like a black whut could sing a song an' dance, an' he looks like a man whut could eat a dawg if he wus hongry, or git in a fight an' pull a laig off an' beat a feller to death wid it."

"Whose laig? Hisn?" Jim asked.

"Naw! Yourn," Skeeter snapped, striking a match to light a cigarette, disgusted with a stupidity which could not understand his eloquence.

"Whut kind of nigger is he?" Jim asked, still seeking for light.

"Gawd knows!" Skeeter sighed through his smoke. "I axed him whut kind of black he was an' he tole me he wus a black Affikin."

"Whut kind bizzness do he do?" Jim persisted.

"He's de official exalted Head Chopper of our lodge," Skeeter responded.

"But whut else do he do?" Jim said impatiently. "Whut is he done befo' he come to dis here Tickfall town?"

"Well, suh, dat's whut teetotally delapidates my mind," Skeeter replied. "He tole me dat he never had no job outside of Affiky ontwell he come to Tickfall an' he said he wucked fer a king in dat country an' was a head chopper."

"Whut did he specify he chopped?" Jim asked with a shudder.

"Heads."

"Whut did he chop 'em fer?" Jim demanded.

"Because de king tole him to, I reckin," Skeeter answered, feeling his way, and speaking in uncertain tones. "I ain't ax no pertickIers. Gawd knows, I don't crave to git too good acquainted wid dat sort of coon."

"Did he git paid by de job? Or did he done piece-wuck?" Jim wanted to know.

"I dunno," Skeeter told him. "He fotch his ax wid him when he come to town an' us elected him head chopper of de lodge. Ef you wants to know anything else about our lodge ax-man, ax him!"

At that moment, Hitch Diamond entered the Hen-scratch and came toward them. Jim Golly noted with thankfulness that he carried no headsman's ax. Like a clumsy bear he rolled up to their table and laid a bulky package upon the top.

"I fotch de money down so us could go to de bank," Hitch rumbled. "Some of de boys is feelin' a little bare in spots wid deir raggety overalls an' dey craves to hab deir new suits sont fer immediate."

"Dat suits me," Jim asserted, springing to his feet. "I got to hang aroun' dis Tickfall town till dem clothes comes, an' de sooner we gits 'em started, de better I'll like it. Dis here way of makin' a living' is slow because I got to linger till my ordahs gits filled."

They walked down the crooked streets of Tickfall's negro settlement and entered the Tickfall bank. Hitch spoke to the teller:

"Dis here cullud pusson wid me is named Jim Golly, Mr. Sam. Us is puttin' lodge money in de bank in Jim's name. We aims to draw it out an' buy us some lodge regalia clothes."

Quickly the teller waited on them, giving Jim a duplicate deposit slip. Then the two stepped over to a desk, and Jim brought forth an envelope from his pocket. Spreading out its contents, he explained:

"Mr. Chopper, dis is de letter I wrote to my bosses. Dis here is a list of all de size measures so de suits will fit. Now I'm gwine write de check for two hundred dollars an' put it in dis letter an' let you mail de letter wid yo' own hand. Is dat c'rect?"

"'Tain't nothin' else," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "I cain't ax no mo'."

During the exhibition of the contents of

the envelope, Jim Golly had watched Hitch with acute attention, and he was convinced that if Hitch could read at all, it was with difficulty. So with more confidence than he had felt before, he wrote a check payable to the "Lodge Regalia Tailoring Co." Everything was legible about the check except the name signed to it. Not even Jim could tell what that was, for he did not know.

Handing the check to Hitch, he pretended to be busy inserting the papers in the envelope, while he watched Hitch from the corner of his eye. Hitch Diamond's knowledge of the bank up to that hour had consisted of certain menial tasks, emptying waste paper baskets, cleaning cuspidors, sweeping floors and wiping windows. This was his first experience as a patron of the bank. A check did not mean anything to him in his life. He couldn't read it. But he inspected it carefully and handed it back to Jim:

"Dat's c'rect," he said easily.

Jim slipped it into the stamped envelope, licked the flap and sealed it, and handed the letter to Hitch.

"You put dis in de post orfice an' dat 'll end our bizzness," Jim said. "I's powerful glad because I don't favor bein' follered around by black Affikin head choppers. Dis is de fust lodge whut has treated me so bad as dat, an' I gits jim-jams thinkin' about it."

"I ain't good comp'ny even to myse'f," Hitch agreed.

"Does I git free now?" Jim inquired.

"I now releases you from custody," Hitch said laboriously trying to recall the words of the ritual. "You is now free to come an' go of yo' own sweet will 'thout de guidunce an' super-sup-supervision of yo' lodge-app'inted gyardeen. May yo' paths be straight an' conshunce be yo' guide."

The two separated at the door of the bank, going in different directions. Jim Golly slipped into a near-by alley to laugh. He sat down and took off his hat and slapped his bulging thigh with his headgear. The affair had worked out admirably for him.

"I now sets aroun' Tickfall, waitin' fer dem lodge clothes whut ain't never arrivin'," he chuckled, as he beat the ground at his feet with his hat. "Dat letter will git gwine, but 'twon't never find nowhar fer to git, because why, dar ain't no place like I sont it to!"

He took a little round mirror out of his vest pocket and glanced at his reflection with unconcealed admiration.

"Dat head chopper ain't never fiddled wid no slick head like me. I don't aim to ketch it in de neck wid no ax."

IV.

Colonel Tom Gaitskill, president of the Tickfall bank, sat upon his porch in gloomy contemplation of a diminutive and defunct holly tree, his latest failure in a fifteen-year effort to root upon his lawn one of these beautiful but obstinate and disappointing shrubs.

"She's dead, Marse Tom," Hitch Diamond remarked unsympathetically, as he contemplated the little dry switch. "'Tain't de fust one us is made a miscue wid. I been plantin' holly trees fer you gwine on a long time—dey's kinder disencouraging."

"I'll try again," Gaitskill sighed, as if the little tree was of utmost importance and its failure to grow a tragic event in his career. "Life is not worth living unless I can make a holly tree grow before I die."

"Ef you ain't prankin', Marse Tom, I'm promisin' you dat you'll die tryin'," Hitch chuckled. "Dem trees is hard to grow. But, Marse Tom, I done come to ax you a 'terrogation: Is our lodge clothes come yit?"

"Your—which?" Gaitskill asked.

"De lodge clothes whut de bank ordered fer us," Hitch explained. "Me an' a nigger named Jim Golly gib you de money 'bout a week ago an' I been kinder watchin' de bank to see wus de clothes piled up in a corner somewhar. It's a hundred suits an' dey'll make a big bundle."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Gaitskill said. "The bank didn't order any clothes for anybody."

"Naw, suh, de order wus sont by Jim Golly," Hitch said.

"Well, I guess they have come." Gaitskill suddenly recalled an incident of the day

at the bank. "I remember a negro of that name who drew out two hundred dollars at noon to-day. The paying teller was at lunch and I waited on him. I didn't know him, but Sam Muir, the receiving teller, recognized him as the man you brought in and introduced several days ago."

"You say he tuck money out, Marse Tom?" Hitch inquired in a frightened tone.

"Yes. I presume your clothes have come and he had to pay for them."

"He couldn't take dat money out, Marse Tom," Hitch replied. "He sont dat money away las' week in a letter."

"I don't know about that," Gaitskill told him. "I simply know that he had the funds in the bank this morning and drew them out at noon."

"My Gawd!" Hitch howled, and without another word he struck a trot across the lawn, down the street, and through the negro settlements of Tickfall to the Nights of Darkness lodge room. Suspended from the rafters of the porch with a chain was a big wagon tire. Unlocking the door of the lodge room, Hitch seized a large wooden mallet and pounded a resounding tattoo upon the tire. It made an astounding racket, echoing through the somnolent negro settlement and almost at the first stroke men began to emerge singly and in groups and ran toward the lodge.

In a few minutes a quorum had assembled, and then Hitch bounced into the room and made the breathless announcement:

"Bad luck, fellers! Jim Golly has done stole all our clothes money an' made hisse'f absent!"

A loud wail was the answer from every man.

The negro is a good sport. The rise and fall of fortune is accepted by him philosophically. He is also a good gamester and gets all the sorrow or joy there is in every play. Emotional by temperament he wins with vociferation of joy and thanksgiving, and when he loses, he mourns his loss. Thus life is always good fun for our brother in black.

And now the rôle was tragedy. Each man had actually suffered a loss of two dollars. But he was going to suffer his two dollars' worth of loss, and, oh, the wailing, the shouting and the tumult! Hitch Diamond, however, had lost two hundred dollars which he was supposed to hold in trust. Therefore, Hitch was the chief mourner! An outsider, passing the lodge and listening, would be justified in thinking that there was wailing, wailing, wailing, because the world was dead.

Then they turned upon Hitch Diamond, and the official Head Chopper found himself the target for all the abuse, vituperation, scorn and contempt of his lodge fellows. Hitch sat with bowed head and listened. He was a slow-wit and he could think of no comeback. What was there to say?

Then they turned to measures of relief and reimbursement.

"Hitch Diamond oughter be made to pay us back," Skeeter Butts squalled.

"He's got a little two-room cabin wuth about two hundred," Pap Curtain reminded them. "Le's sell it an' take de money ourselves!"

"Naw! Le's git him a job an' colleck his wages ourselfs till we pays ourselfs back," Figger Bush barked.

"Le's fix him up a prize fight an' colleck de gate receeps," Mustard Prophet proposed.

Vinegar Atts arose and gave the sign for silence. Then the president spoke with the voice of authority:

"Hitch Diamond is de official Head Chopper of his here lodge. I moves dat we go out in de byways an' highways an' hedges an' ketch dat Jim Golly nigger an' let Hitchie chop his head off."

"How come we didn't think of dat befo'?" Skeeter Butts squalled. "Jim wus in de bank at dinner time an' he ain't got such an awful good start-off."

"Dat makes me feel better," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "I'll take my ax wid me I'll chop his head off whar I finds him. You don't hab to fotch him back to me. Jes' tote me to him!"

Led by Hitch Diamond with his battle-ax, the mob stamped down the steps like a drove of horses crossing a gangplank, and they scattered in every direction to begin their search. And each man, as he clattered down the stairs, walked above the head or

a whimpering, frightened little fat darkey who clutched a big book of clothier's samples to his soft and palpitating stomach.

Jim Golly had seen Hitch coming to raise the alarm and had hidden under the stairs which led up to the lodge room. He had heard all that was said and now terror laid hold upon him.

The man hunt had begun and he was the object of their search.

V.

NEXT a loud wail from the women. Just before the bank closed for the day, Jim Golly had appeared before the Sisterhood of the Seven Stars, had displayed his samples, and had sold them all a lodge dress accepting a deposit of two dollars each. He had gone to the bank and had changed their small currency into five twenty-dollar bills. He had then gone into a grocery and bought a bottle of mucilage. That was the last seen of him. Where, oh, where was Jim Golly now?

Dividing the searching party into squads, runners were sent out on all the roads leading from Tickfall. Five men, led by Figger Bush, started for the Mississippi River to search for the fugitive at the spot where Figger had first seen him. Colored men loafed at the depot, watching the trains. And during all the excitement, Jim Golly shivered with fear under the steps of the Nights of Darkness lodge.

At midnight Jim crawled out, bringing his precious book of tailoring samples with him. Dodging like a fat rabbit, he made his way to the railroad track, hoping to hop a free ride to safety on a freight which stopped at a watering tank on the border of the town.

Hitch Diamond was patrolling the track with his battle-ax upon his shoulder. As the advancing freight engine rounded a turn, a shaft of light illumined the track for a mile. Hitch saw a shadowy form leap for the darkness beside the track, and Hitch was instantly in hot pursuit. Beside the track there was a swamp of ooze and water making it impossible for the fugitive to escape to the woods; upon the track glowed the powerful headlight of the engine making it impossible for him to cross to the other side without detection. This enabled Hitch to chase the man down one side of the track. The thundering freight caught up with them, but Hitch raced on, knowing that the fugitive could not cross under the moving cars. By the time the train had come to a stop, the two men were far beyond the last car, and Hitch was still chasing Jim down the right-of-way.

There was nothing now for Jim Golly to do but to keep moving on down the track. The Coolie swamp was on either side of the railroad track for sixteen miles. Its depth was indeterminate, it was navigable only to web-footed creatures, and a death trap to man. So Golly trotted on, carrying his heavy sample book, Hitch Diamond in hot pursuit.

At early dawn, Jim came to a ridge which led from the track to the Mississippi River. A dim path followed the ridge, an animal trail, but Jim took it. He could hide better in the brush along that path, even if he did not dare to forsake the ridge and go off into the swamp.

Hitch Diamond, knowing the ways of all fleeing negroes, unerringly chose that path as the one Jim had taken. All the morning he followed, stopping at intervals to listen and believing at times that he heard the rustle of the underbrush ahead of him. Shortly after noon, he caught the first glimpse of Golly through a clearing in the woods.

Hitch was an athlete with muscles of oak and iron. Jim was a crook with soft bones covered with flabby fat. After twenty miles of pursuit, Hitch was still going strong. After twenty miles of flight, Jim was putting one foot in front of the other only by the effort of his will made strong by fear of death. Hunger gnawed at his vitals with the teeth of agony, thirst sand-papered his tongue until his mouth was filled with ash and dust, exhaustion covered him like a suffocating cloak. But he was still very much attached to his fat head and had no desire to part with it under the headsman's decapitating ax.

In the middle of the afternoon, Jim ran out upon the sandbar, where, seven days before, he had first met Figger Bush and his

friends. The river stretched before his weary eyes, beyond the water lay safety, and a canoe waited for him in the willows along the shore. With a sob of gratitude, he trotted across the sand, whimpering in pain and fright. Two hundred yards from the edge of the water, he rounded a clump of willows, screamed like a maniac, and fell flat upon his face!

Lying before him on the sand were the heads of five negro men!

All night long, all the morning, up to this hour in the afternoon, Jim had been fleeing from that awful African head chopper, who had served his tribal king in the jungles of Ethiopia. Again and again as exhaustion had threatened to overcome him, he had been spurred to go forward by an image of his own head lying upon the ground, his tricky brain and his selfish heart severed forever. And now he had run upon this ghastly exhibition of the executioner's skill. He did not notice that each head was smoking a cigarette. He just dropped his sample book, fell down right there on the spot, and squalled!

Figger Bush and his comrades, having watched the river all night in vain, had washed their clothes, laid them out on the sand to dry, and were now buried in the sand up to their necks to keep the mosquitoes from feasting on them while their garments were drying in the sun.

Hitch Diamond came around the clump of willows, waving his dreadful battle-ax. Jim Golly sprang to his feet. He stooped to pick up his sample book, but Hitch's ax descended with a vicious swish and the keen blade went through every page of the book and pinioned the volume to the ground. Jim squealed and fled, Hitch following, the pursuit augmented by five black, naked runners!

Jim stumbled in the deep sand and fell. Instantly the pack was upon him.

"Search him!" Figger Bush squalled. "Take his money offen him an' gimme my two dollars."

They lifted the exhausted man to his feet and searched him thoroughly. Jim begged them not to kill him. Their search revealed that Jim Golly did not have a penny on his person.

"Whar's dat money?" Hitch Diamond bellowed. "Fotch it fo'th!"

"Befo' Gawd, I ain't got it, fellers," Jim whimpered. "De Head Chopper seen me put dat check in dat letter an' send it away."

"Dat's a lie!" Hitch howled. "Marse Tom Gaitskill tole me dat you drawed dat money outen his bank to-day."

"He's got it hid, Hitchie!" Figger Bush barked. "You go back an' fotch dat ax from whar you drapped it by dat book, an' we'll let you chop dis coon off a piece at a time ontwell he tells us whar our money is hid at."

Hitch marched back to get possession of the ax. Jim Golly watched until he saw that he had a good start ahead of the man who wore clothes, then he tore himself away and ran.

Five unclothed men followed him to a certain point, then they stopped. For Jim, with his clothes on, plunged into some bushes up to his waist. The others could not follow, for they were sticker weeds, and no unclad flesh could stand the torture of travel through those poisonous nettles.

Hitch Diamond saw the situation and bawled a command:

"Run to de river!"

With a loud whoop, they all started. But they were compelled to detour while Jim made a bee-line. They touched the water's edge just as Jim Golly sat down in his canoe and sent it out from the bank with a stroke of his oar. The unclad men leaped into the water to follow, but they were too late. Hitch Diamond picked up a large chunk of wood and hurled it at the canoe. It struck against the stern and merely accelerated Jim's progress toward the other shore.

"Good-by, Loozeanna!" Jim howled in derision.

And now the disappointed and defeated sons of the Nights of Darkness stood upon the shore and mourned the loss of both their man and their money, cursing their impotence, and making the river echo with their wails of wrath and woe. The sound must have been music to the ears of the harassed and distressed Jim Golly as his oars carried him further from their hatred

and vengeance. They watched the fugitive land on the other side, pull his canoe up in the willows, and disappear in the undergrowth.

"Dar now!" Figger Bush mourned. "My two good dollars is plum' gone forever!"

The afternoon sun was hot upon the baking sand around them, the mosquitoes had found them, so they sauntered sadly back to the shadow of the clump of willows and their abandoned holes in the sand.

Hitch sat down, despairing and hopeless. He had done his best and failure and defeat were his reward. Hardly conscious of his action, he began to chop at the big sample book with the keen blade of his battle-ax.

"I figger dat I better not go back to Tickfall, fellers," he said. "I ain't likely to be populous wid all de lodge members atter I loss dat two hundred dollars fer 'em. I resigns my head choppin' job right now an' I'll let you-alls tote dis ole ax back to de lodge."

"Dey shore will wool you aroun' ef you go back," Pap Curtain agreed. "Dey'll buzz you scand'lous. I don't blame you fer skedaddlin'. I feels kinder pesticated myse'f wid de way you busted in yo' job."

"I figgers you will git expellt from de lodge even ef you does make yo'se'f absent," Mustard Prophet remarked. "As a lodge, we ain't never suffered no loss as big as you done pulled down on us, an' we don't aim to fergit it."

"Us feels like you oughter be made a example of," Figger Bush said.

Hitch stopped hacking at the book with his ax, and absently spread open the pages and gazed with unseeing eyes upon its little scraps of colored cloth. Out of the center of a large sample which he had cut in half with a downward stroke of his ax, he saw a raveling. He pulled at it with his fingers, put it into his mouth, chewed it mechanically, then reached for more fodder.

The second raveling was different from the first. It came out from under the sample and appeared to be a slip of colored paper. With his thoughts occupied with his trouble, he unfolded the paper, playing with it in his fingers. Then he sat up with a jerk.

It was one half of a twenty-dollar bill!

From the other side of the sample, he extracted the other half of the currency which he had cleft in two with his ax.

With a loud whoop, the other men came out of their sand holes to him and began to examine the other cloth samples. Some were pasted only at the top, others were glued solidly to the page, and beneath each of the well-pasted samples was a ten-dollar bill!

"Bless Gawd!" Figger Bush howled. "Dat's how come dat Jim Golly bought dat bottle of glue!"

"Us is got our money back, niggers," Hitch Diamond bellowed joyfully. "We'll leave it pasted jes' whar it is an' show it to de lodge."

They started joyfully back to town, singing songs of praise for Hitch Diamond, proclaiming to the world their gratitude for the recovery of their money.

At the edge of the woods where they were to leave the path and enter the highroad which led to Tickfall, Hitch Diamond stopped and grinned at his companions.

"Is you niggers aimin' to go back to Tickfall wid me?" he asked quietly.

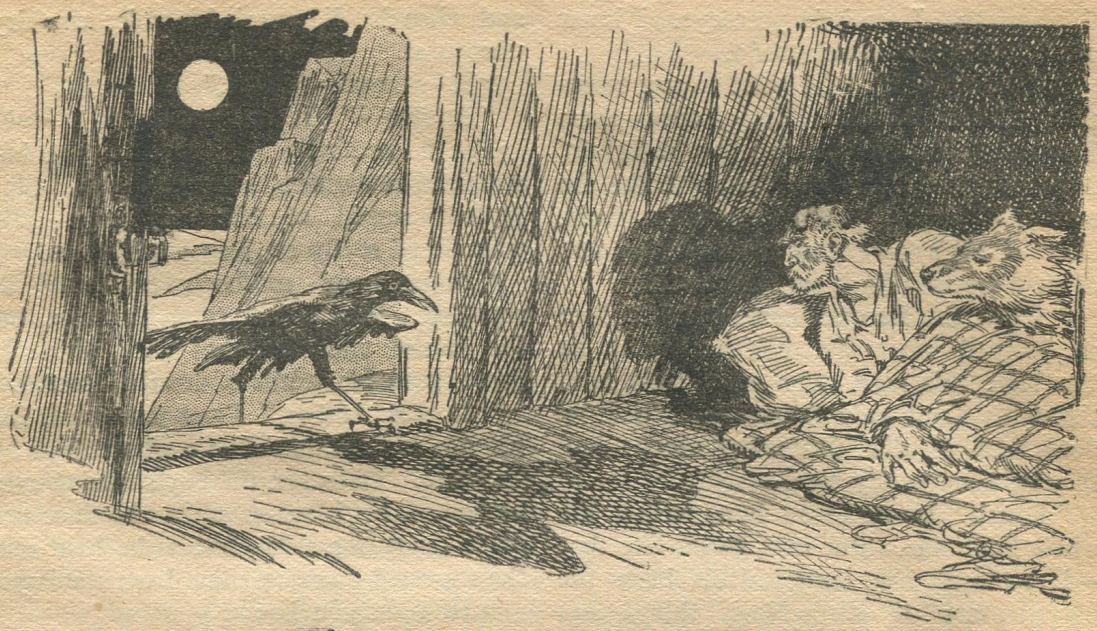
"Suttinly," they replied in chorus.

"Dat's all right," Hitch said with a slow smile. "I'm proud to git yo' comp'ny. But I advices you-all to go back on de sandbar an' put on yo' clothes. Not a nigger of you is got on a rag!"

Can you imagine a use for would-be suicides? One man thought out such a thing and founded the Suicide Club, a strange organization you can read about next week in

PERIDOUX BY FRED JACKSON

one of the most strikingly original Novelettes we have ever published.



The Avenging Shepherd

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Smoke of the Forty-Five," "Out of the Silent North," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

JOSEPH GAULT, son of a Nevada cattleman, marries Margarida Irosabal, daughter of a Basque sheepman. For this defiance of local prejudices Gault is held no better than a squawman by his people, and the girl, an outcast by her race. The young couple make their home on deserted Buckskin Mountain, and here is born another Joseph. The boy, even in his childhood, is friend of the wild things of the mountain and makes them his playmates. The father finds a cowboy shot dead under circumstances that force this "squawman" to flee until public excitement abates and he may venture back for a fair trial. Margarida, pining for her absent husband, dies. Joseph, her son, is sent away by a friendly rancher to be educated. A dozen years later the Basque herders give Buckskin Mountain a wide berth because of ghostly figures seen there. Peter Organ, a very old man, has a shrewd idea as to the inhabitant on the heights, and he makes his way there. He finds a flashing youth with piercing black eyes and an uncut mane of reddish-brown hair, whose speech resembles that of neither the mountaineers nor the desert men. But when old Peter reveals that he has information about the crime that caused innocent Joe Gault to flee, the young stranger acknowledges that he is Joseph, the son.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVEN UNTO THE LOWEST.

WITH that peculiar reticence of men who lead lonely lives, old Peter refrained from asking the many questions which rushed to his tongue. That the lad was Joseph, here in the flesh and not dead, surprised him less than may be imagined.

The manner of the boy's coming, his strange dress, the return of the coyote—these were matters of far greater interest at the moment. In fact, they occupied Peter's attention so fully that many minutes passed before he spoke of that storm tossed night when Kit Dorr was killed.

"Joseph," he said solemnly, "I am afeerd that what I'm a-goin' to tell you will lead to more killin's—you bein' here

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 22.

this-a-away. I see it in yore eye. I know what you've come back to do.

"A-fore I tell you, I want to say somethin' about Angel. You know, these Basques ain't a bad people; they're fightin' men. In some ways they're right like the mountain people yore daddy came from. Yore daddy's paw and me and the rest of us fi't pretty hard for this country.

"When the Basques came pilin' in here we jumped 'em. We didn't allow to let 'em have this land after what we'd been through. Lord only knows what we'd a-done with it all! But they stuck; and they've done pretty well.

"Lookin' back, I see how foolish the whole fight was. But men go on like that—like Angel has done. He's been the biggest fool of all. Now, things has changed—everythin' but him! The country's changed; the Basques has changed; and they're a goin' to keep on changin'. They can't do nuthin' else; they ain't ever goin' back to Spain.

"And so I want to ask you—what's Angel got for himself out of all the hatin' he's done? He's an old man—I reckon he's known his mistakes for a long time—but he's afeered to admit it now; he's too stiff-necked. I guess God's just lettin' him live till he's willin' to eat crow.

"No matter what you do to him, Joseph, I won't hold it agin you. He's got it a-comin' to him, but boy, if you'd only promise—"

"Please! Do not exact a promise from me. This matter concerns only that man and me. No one must come between us. But his death would only defeat my purpose. Angel Irosabal must live. Tell me—who killed Kit Dorr?"

The suddenness of the question made Peter recoil. It grew very still in the little dug-out. Both man and boy seemed to be caught up and held motionless in a tensely charged way. Waiting—one to hear, and the other to voice—a brief syllable or two; and both fully conscious that the course of their lives might well be changed thereby.

Joseph's eyes never left the old man's. Seconds dragged by before Peter's lips moved. No sound escaped them, however, and when he did speak his voice was dry, unnatural.

"It—it was—Andres."

"Andres—" It was a whisper.

For a seemingly endless time, the boy remained motionless, his eyes closed. Slippy-foot stared at him anxiously. She whimpered softly as Joseph sat down.

"Andres—my mother's brother!" he repeated. He did not raise his voice, but the hatred and bitterness with which he spoke gave his words a dreadful sound.

"It was Andres," Peter muttered, but his was not the air of one who enjoys his own tale. To escape the boy's staring eyes, he spread his blankets upon the floor and made ready for sleep, but as he bent over the expected question came from the boy:

"How do you know?"

"Joseph," Peter scolded, "don't look at me that-a-way. You make me feel all clammy and cold as if death was stalkin' around in *here*."

"Oh, man, go on," the boy insisted. "How do you know it was Andres?"

The old man pulled off his boots and sat down upon his blankets before he spoke.

"I heard him say so," he began. "When I got into that pocket I crawled way in below the ledge and rolled up and tried to go to sleep. I was on foot and me thankin' my stars I didn't have no animal to look after that night, when I caught sound of some one comin' up the hog-back. I don't remember who I thought it was. It wa'n't late—'bout eight thirty. A man had to yell that night to make himself heard.

"I savvy Basque pretty well, and the first word I made out was *zaldiak*—horses. In those days the Basque *gente* wa'n't particularly welcome round here. I got kinda curious right off. And the next minute I heard those horses comin' right down into that pocket. One of the men—they was two of them—tried to strike a light, but you couldn't make fire even thar that night." Peter paused and reflected for a moment.

"I didn't say nuthin'," he went on; "I knew they didn't know I was there."

"Who was the second man?" Joseph interrupted him to ask.

"Andres's kid brother, Timoteo. The kid went on directly, but he left Andres in the pocket. Andres was to follow him on foot when he thought the time was right. Well, I was doin' some pretty fast thinkin'. Here was hell to pay, for fair, and me not knowin' what to do.

"I wa'n't afraid of Timoteo. I reckoned your daddy could manage him if this thing that was brewin' was aimed at your folks. Andres had me trapped; and so we stayed thar—me under the ledge and him backed against his horse—waitin' and waitin'.

"I guess an hour must have passed. God, it was awful. I wanted to yell and get out where they was air; I was stranglin'—Andres thar all that time, so close, and not knowin' that I was watchin' him.

"Well, he gave a yell all of a sudden and jumpin' into his saddle he fanned it out of thar, leadin' the kid's horse behind him. I got out and stretched myself directly. I hadn't been able to do no thinkin' with him thar.

"I'd heard them tossing a word back and forth that I hadn't savvied. It came to me, then—nippers! That meant wire! I began to see a thing or two right off. Those boys were out to cut the Circle-Z fence. Wa'n't no other wire for 'em to cut.

"I felt considerable relieved. Thad Taylor of the Circle-Z wa'n't no bosom friend of mine. 'Let him look out for his own wire,' I said to myself and I crawled back into my nest, thinkin' that those boys had a good night for what they was about, whether they got away with it or not.

"But I wa'n't any sleepier then than I am right now, which I ain't at all. I knew if they came back, I'd hear them. More than an hour passed; nuthin' happened. And then I heard horses comin' on the run. I got up and listened.

"In about a minute Andres flashed by. He was cryin'—mad. He was gibberin' to himself in Basque: 'I killed him! I killed him!' He had the kid's horse on a rope, but the saddle was empty.

"'He's killed the kid,' I told myself, and so I thought until the posse dug me out and told me that Kit Dorr had been murdered, and that they was after your paw.

"Save for tellin' Kincaid, I ain't said nuthin' 'till now. You can guess what happened, can't you?—two men was killed that night."

"Dorr and Timoteo—"

"Ain't a doubt of it. The boy went down to cut the wire. Kit got him. Andres came along later, stampedin' your sheep. The kid must have crawled away and tipped him off, and Andres nailed Kit."

"A supposition—"

"Facts is what I'm tellin' you," Peter exclaimed. "Kit was killed by a .30-30 bullet. Andres had the rifle."

"But Timoteo—I remember it was said that he had gone to Spain."

Peter smiled weakly.

"So it was said," he replied. "But he's never come back. Timoteo went a lot further than Spain that night."

"But his body—?"

"Never been found—leastwise not that any one knows of. I looked for it. You know, Joseph," and Peter fastened his eyes on the boy's face, "I've always felt that your mother found it—that somewhere on this mountain little Timoteo lies buried. He was Angel's baby. I tell you he looked for him. You know how range is now—he needs more—but he's never run a head of stock up here. In his eyes this mountain is a tomb."

"Yes; and from this tomb I will arise to humble him and his sons."

He got to his feet and stood over the old man. Unconsciously he raised his right hand.

"When you leave here, make no mystery of me. Let them know I am Joseph. You can serve me best that way. I have come back to avenge my mother; to see justice done my father—and it will be done unto both of them.

"When I found my mother cold in death she held clutched in her hands, my schoolboy slate. On it she had written a message—I have come back to fulfill every word of it. I do not doubt that she found Timoteo, nor do I question but what I know where to find his body. He will serve me well.

"Angel Irosabal—he and his sons—shall be humbled, broken—cast into the dust. Let them look to me! For I warn you, my friend, that the seven lean years are upon this land, even as they were upon Egypt. The time of plenty has passed.

"There shall be no rain in summer; no snow in winter; the sage and grass shall wither and die, and a famine will be upon the land. The very men whose flocks have worn the roads to powder will live to see their sheep dying of hunger.

"Never have they thought of the lean years, and yet, it was the lean years that drove them out of California—and lack of food will drive them out of this valley. In its abundance, they have wasted this land and they will have no place to turn in their anguish. They will sell their flocks and herds for a pittance, or they will die."

Joseph lowered his hand and gazed intently at Peter.

"And now, my friend," he said, "a secret for a secret. There is one who has moved about in these hills—unknown, unseen—leasing land, contracting for it against a day to come. And that day is near. He has schemed well. For months he has known that when fall comes, a scratch of the pen will close the reservation to sheep.

"And though he knows me not—that man is my father."

Old Peter was left speechless. There was something uncanny, unreal, about this boy. He spoke with such an air of finality, of truth, that the aged man felt the absurdity of questioning his words. Joseph's appearance, his dress and the weirdness of his surroundings combined to instill in him a feeling of awe such as no other man had ever awakened. A Basque, steeped in superstition, would run in fear from the boy.

Just now, with that matter-of-fact tone which one uses to announce trivial happenings, he made a statement not less startling than word of his own presence there on the mountain had been. And the calm assurance with which he looked forward to the adjusting of his account with his grandfather; his frankly expressed conviction that he was there as God's instrument; the biblical flavor of his speech—Peter thought of these things in a muddled way.

He wished himself elsewhere. As in a vision, he saw the Gaults—father and son—biding their time, waiting the propitious moment, gathering strength to strike—grim, unrelenting, unforgiving, never forgetting, placing their dependence in God. By comparison, he felt himself impotent, decisionless.

Was it fear of this boy that made him so uneasy? Hot anger flared in his old veins as he answered his own question. Suddenly, he reached out for his boots, determined to sleep in the open, but his hand paused in mid-air. Some one was coming.

Peter cocked his head and listened expectantly. The sound which reached his ears was not that of a human footfall, nor was it the soft pad-pad of an animal's feet. It was strange, grating, harsh in the stillness.

Peter glanced at Slippy-foot. Her hair was ruffled, and she was backing away from the door, but she neither whimpered nor growled.

Joseph had turned and was staring out into the night. Peter tried to read his feeling from the pose of his back, but he found it straight, untensed—apparently untouched by any emotion.

Whatever was approaching the dug-out was coming toward it with a measured stride. Peter had become aware of the rhythmic insistence of the ghastly sound that it made. He felt a shiver pass up and down his spine.

It was not the wolf shiver. He had trembled at the timber gray's call too many times not to recognize it. Never had the wolf cry brought him a sense of fear and he knew that the thing which gripped him now was fear.

He drew his legs up as he waited. Slippy-foot nudged closer to him, and he was glad she was there.

Then in the doorway appeared the thing that had frightened him. Blacker than the night it was; with lordly mien it strutted into the room, its black claws tapping upon the hard-packed floor, its gold-rimmed eyes wide, piercing—the wisdom of the world in their depths—a giant crow!

It made no cry as it advanced. Peter's mouth had sagged open. As in a daze, he stared at the sleek feathered thing standing before him. He drew back into his blankets, his blood cold. Watching, he saw the great bird spread its wings and rise to the table, where it perched in forbidding importance, its black head rolling from side to side—ominous, chilling, the hand-servant of Death.

For forty years this grisly bird had scoured the desert, despised of men and feasting on the dead, but doing that which nature had intended it to do; justifying its place in the great scheme of things that is life; its only law, the survival of the fittest. Ever had man's hand been raised against it. And yet it entered the dug-out this night, unafraid.

Peter wanted to cry out and ask what ill-omened business brought it there, but his voice would not come. Everything that happened this night had a queer draw to it! Where would this hellish nightmare end? He wanted to get out—away; to fill his lungs with clean air again. He willed his hands to grasp his boots, but they refused to obey, and he could only sit and stare at that great, black, blinking thing there before him.

"Look not on this bird as an enemy," he heard Joseph say. "He is an old friend—I call him Grimm. He passes on all that I do; and he is never wrong. He never mistakes an enemy for a friend. He it was who told me you were coming up the mountain to-night. He says nothing now because he accepts you as a friend."

"Take him away," Peter gasped. "He makes my flesh creep. Are you mad? Havin' such things about you!"

Joseph smiled at him.

"I understand you," he said. "Here you see me, clad in rags, my companions the scavenger coyote and the carrion crow—outcasts of the desert—reviled, unloved—what a picture! And yet it is given even unto the lowest to reward kindness with faithfulness.

"When you speak of me, speak of my companions, for we are three; and if the least of these shall love me, I will not fail.

"I can read the present; Slippy-foot the coyote reads the past; and Grimm, most maligned of all feathered creatures, unveils the mysteries of the future!"

CHAPTER IX.

TIMOTEO SPEAKS.

FROM the day that he had returned to Buckskin, Joseph had cast his eyes at its rocky crest. Throughout the years he had looked forward to the time when he should stand there and read the message his mother had left him. In fancy, he had done so a thousand times. And yet—now that he was there—he had found himself reluctant to face it.

As he had grown older, a fixed idea of what he would find had settled on him; but his return to the mountain had destroyed that assurance. He had expected to find his old home still standing and in his bitterness at finding it destroyed he had told himself he dared not hope that any sign remained for him on Buckskin.

Peter Organ had explained many things to Joseph. For a day after the old man had left, the boy did not leave the coulee. With great patience he arranged in his mind what Peter had said. Of one thing he was certain—his mother's message was a secret no longer. He felt that he knew its contents in full. It was not what he had expected. But his way was clear before him now; and at sunrise, the following morning, he stood upon the mountain top.

The world was still—hushed with the wonder of the coming day. Far below him, the desert floated in a lavender sea; to the east the distant Tuscarora Mountains were splashed with warm yellows and cold pinks.

Slippy-foot leaped to the topmost pinnacle and, lifting her head, she barked a greeting to the sun-god. Almost at once the sun leaped clear of the far horizon and flooded mountain and plain with vibrant light. As if pursued, the gray shadows, lingering in cañon and draw, took to flight and were gone.

At this moment the glory of the universe was God's. Joseph raised his hands devoutly and, lifting his eyes to Heaven, he gave thanks to his Creator.

How long he stood there or how many minutes passed before he realized that he was staring at a message carved on the enduring granite of the pinnacle upon which Slippy-foot stood, he could not have said. Slowly his brain began to function. His eyes grew wide, for the message they read was for him. Word by word, he said it aloud.

"SACRED
To the Memory of
JOSEPH GAULT."

The letters were uneven, graceless—carved upon the naked rock by his mother's feeble hands. Pride, love of her who had loved his father so well, consumed him. In comparison, all else seemed small and mean.

It was not his way to fall upon his knees in humility. Erect, militant, he addressed himself to his Maker—"talking to God," as he would have said—and it well may be that Buckskin shall never again hear such a prayer.

In the end, his eyes sought the message once more—the lasting tribute of a woman's faith. He came close to it and touched the letters with his fingers. Although his eyes were dry, his lips were white as he turned away. Memories of his boyhood rushed to his mind, and with the haunting freshness with which one sees things in a dream he saw himself a lad again.

Solemn-visaged Grimm came and perched beside him, his red-lidded, gold-rimmed eyes blinking questioningly; but Joseph gave no sign that he saw him. The boy had waited so long for this hour on the mountain top that he was in no great hurry to bring his wandering thoughts back to the task of searching for the secret which he knew must be hidden there. When he did begin searching for it, he arose leisurely, his face almost devoid of any sign of eagerness.

In a tiny fissure directly beneath the inscription, he found a heap of small rocks. Something about the way in which they were piled seemed to say that human hands had once arranged them in a more exact formation. Indians often covered the graves of their dead with such cairns. Was this, then, the secret his mother had left him—Timoteo's grave?

Joseph bent down and began removing the rocks nearest the inscription. He had not gone far before he saw the neck of a bottle protruding from the cairn. Grimm cawed as Joseph grasped it.

The boy glanced at him apprehensively. From where he perched, the great bird could not have seen the bottle. It contained a paper—a letter—the very thing for which they had come!

Joseph shook his head as he broke off the neck of the bottle, believing, but far from understanding how Grimm had known that the quest was ended.

On drawing forth the letter, Joseph discovered a second message, in Basque, pinned to it. This second letter of only a few lines had been written with a pencil upon a leaf of paper torn from a notebook. The other letter was addressed to him. It read:

My Joseph:

My brother Timoteo lies here. Dorr shot him. I found his body and buried it. In his hand was the message you will find pinned to this letter.

It will tell you what you want to know. Your father was an innocent man. You must see that justice is done him. Think not of my people. If they suffer, so it must be, for your great duty is to yourself and to the man whose name you bear.

Above all else, my son, be true to yourself. It is my great wish.

Your Mother.

Joseph exhibited no surprise at what he read, for old Peter had prepared him for this very thing. Timoteo's message, however, was of absorbing interest. He studied it with puzzled brow, raking his mind for a word or two out of the past. Except for three or four simple expressions, he knew no Basque. The message was addressed to Angel. Joseph made out part of the first line. It began:

My brother, Andres—

Several lines lower, he caught Dorr's name. Allowing for the contractions of the language and the combinations of words which could be expressed by one word, he took it for granted that whatever the first

line said about "My brother Andres" it had no reference to Dorr.

Andres's name was repeated in the line in which Dorr's name occurred. So the message must say two things: something about Andres and Dorr; and something about Andres and Timoteo. Joseph could only guess what the latter statement might be. And yet, it was vital to his plans that he know for a certainty what this message said.

He wished that Peter had not gone on. He was one of the few, outside of the Basques themselves, who even attempted to speak the tongue. Later, Joseph realized that it was unlikely that the old man could read or write a word of Basque, for his knowledge of the language was doubtless restricted to a matter of sounds.

During the succeeding days, the boy sat for hours with Timoteo's message in his hands. In all that time, he deciphered only one phrase: "*d-arrai-t*"—"it follows me."

There was a ranger's cabin just beyond Coal Creek. Joseph thought of going there in the hope of meeting some of the Basque herders then in the Reserve. He soon argued himself out of the notion, however, for if Timoteo's message said that Andres had killed Dorr, then no one but old Angel himself must read it. It was, potentially, a powerful weapon, and not to be misused.

For five days after Peter had left the mountain, Joseph did nothing but study the letter. No one came to spy on him, for Peter talked but little in town, and that little was received skeptically. Men laughed at his story of the lean years to come.

Joseph had convinced Peter that night in the dug-out, but even he found the tale fanciful now that he was back in his accustomed haunts. At times he wondered if the boy had not been touched by some strange malady of the brain. If he could have seen Joseph staring trancelike at the penciled note for hours at a time, Slippy-foot and Grimm at his feet, apparently as sorely perplexed as their master, he would have found it hard to have believed otherwise.

The deciphering of Timoteo's message had become an obsession. Just where it might have carried Joseph, it is impossible to say, but he was destined to have the note made plain to him in a most startling manner.

After reading his mother's letter, he had replaced it in the bottle and brought it to the dug-out. Timoteo's note had so engaged his attention ever since that he had not touched the bottle. That he picked it up now was only because he was about to pin the two messages together again preparatory to putting them away. He had determined to go back to the mountain top and search the cairn for some sign of the missing notebook.

Idly turning over his mother's letter, as he pinned the two papers together, he was rendered speechless on finding himself gazing at a translation of Timoteo's note. Perspiration dewed his brow as he stared at it. It was addressed to Timoteo's father and said:

> My brother Andres, the coward, has left me to die. I called to him, but he took the horses and ran. Dorr shot me as I finished cutting the fence. Andres killed him as he bent over me. But I see now that he will hang for it. It is morning. I hear a crow. It follows me. It has not long to wait. Grieve not, my father. What were you to expect of men raised to hate their own?
>
> TIMOTEO.

Grimm cawed as Joseph finished reading the note. The boy looked at him coldly.

"Grimm," he muttered, "I wonder if it was you who followed Timoteo and cawed a requiem for his soul. And you, Slippy-foot—what would you have to say if you could speak? For once the eyes of both of you are veiled. But no matter. We have waited long enough. To-night the three of us shall attend one whose debt is heavy."

CHAPTER X.

THE SYMBOL OF HELPLESSNESS.

ALMOST a week had passed now since Joseph had left the coulee and in that time, although his flock numbered only a score, the sweet grass had been

grazed to the roots. So, having made up his mind to go to the valley that night, he moved across the mountain in the early afternoon, driving his sheep to the timber-clover above the spring.

One would hardly have guessed from his placid face that the long awaited fight was so near at hand. His present position afforded him even a better view of the valley than was to be had from the coulee and, leaning on his staff, he stood for many minutes gazing moodily at old Angel's *caserio*, a dazzling white in the afternoon sunlight.

It pleased him to know that he would find his grandfather alone. Not for another two weeks would any of his sons or grandsons return from the Reserve for supplies. Joseph thought of the time when he had been turned away from the great man's door without even a sight of him.

It should be different this night. And yet, he deliberately kept himself from forming any definite plan of what he must do. This meeting to-night must be free to proceed as fate willed. At best, it could be but the beginning of his grandfather's retribution.

It may have been fancy, but Joseph felt that Grimm and Slippy-foot caught his mood. Both were plainly nervous, and when he gave the word to start back down the mountain they obeyed eagerly.

The sun had dropped below the horizon by the time Joseph reached the coulee and while Slippy-foot worked the flock until it was ready to bed down, Joseph cooked his supper. A peculiar sadness rested upon his face now. To his ears came the sounds he had always associated with evening—the calling of the whippoorwill, the cheeping of the plover in the sage and, from some distant peak, the barking of a coyote. Unconsciously he threw back his head and gazed up at the crest of Buckskin.

He found it as he had ever found it at this hour—majestic in its rose colored mantle, the gift of the sun which he could no longer see. Already the valley was bathed in opalescent twilight. So vividly did these sights and sounds bring back the past that he turned and gazed across the coulee at the spot where the cabin had once stood. All that was needed to complete the picture was his old home, a wisp of smoke curling lazily up from its wide chimney. Here he had stood a hundred times and more at this hour, the appetizing aroma of supper in his nostrils.

So poignant were his memories that he winced—all these years! He wet his lips with his tongue as he stared about him in the deepening twilight. Soon, night fell, and the valley faded from view. The time to go had arrived. Without invitation, Grimm fluttered to his shoulder. Slippy-foot needed no word and she slunk away.

Joseph chose to follow the old trail which led into the valley by way of the Circle-Z fence—now just a fence, and no longer the barrier it once had been, for the West had changed. The boy communed with himself as he went along. The night had had its effect on him, and his thoughts were grim.

In the days since he had roamed the mountain as a boy, old Thad Taylor, the owner of the Circle-Z, had built a new ranch house at the mouth of the box cañon in which Eagan and Tiny Mears had weathered the great storm. Joseph caught the glow of its lighted windows as he reached the fence. He had known of it, and he went on without halting. Some minutes later the moon peeked over the shoulder of the mountain and bathed the valley with its mellow light.

Before long, Joseph came to an arroyo through which a well-worn trail led to Angel Irosabal's *caserio*. He turned into it, but he had proceeded only a little way when he saw Slippy-foot pause and raise her nose. He stopped short, and the bleating of a lamb reached his ears. It was off to his right in the tumbled *malpais*.

He started on, but the lamb bleated again. It was a pitiable cry, hopeless and entreating, and so out of key with his thoughts that Joseph trembled as he called Slippy-foot back and started across the arroyo in the direction from which the lamb had called.

Five minutes later Slippy-foot announced that she had found the lamb. The coyote's presence filled it with fear, and it bleated loudly until Joseph reached it. He saw

that the lamb had stepped into an old, rusted coyote trap. Using his staff as a pry, he opened the trap and picked up the lamb. Its right foreleg was torn, and it began to swell rapidly.

Joseph looked at the lamb wonderingly, seeing in it the symbol of helplessness and, as such, at variance with the spirit which motivated him this night. The lamb raised its head and, with eyes heavy with suffering, gazed at him questioningly. Suddenly, Joseph saw himself mean—the business he was about less vital, less urgent than it had been.

Slippy-foot had gone on and she turned and eyed Joseph sullenly as she saw that he made no move to follow her. Grimm fluttered his wings as if impatient.

Joseph shook his head as he sensed their urging. To leave the lamb here was to let it die. He was quite aware of the tragedies that befall stock running wild on the range, and in a way he was hardened to it, recognizing it as inevitable. Nevertheless, he could not go on, knowing that but for his refusing to accept the responsibility of caring for it the lamb would live.

The Circle-Z ranch house was no great distance away, and although old Thad Taylor was reputed to have never overcome his hatred of sheep and all that sheepmen stood for, Joseph decided to take the stricken lamb to him.

Slippy-foot still stood her distance and she came back grudgingly when Joseph called to her. He smiled as he glanced from her to Grimm and found the crow shaking his head solemnly as if decrying this move.

"No—," he said banteringly; "you cannot tempt me. We are going back. And if this lamb had half the wisdom of either of you, he would smile with me for, beyond doubt, he belongs to Angel Irosabal."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEED IS PLANTED.

SOME there were who had smiled when Angel Irosabal had first sown wheat in Paradise Valley, but in those days water rights were not so jealously guarded, and he had irrigated his fields to suit his pleasure. Martin Creek came tumbling out of the Santa Rosas on his range and with much ado, especially in early spring, cut across his ranch to the Circle-Z line.

To help himself to its bounty was quite in keeping with the code of practice of those early days. It followed, therefore, that his wheat thrived. With passing years he had given more and more acreage to it, for he was shrewd enough to see that it was more profitable to send his flocks into the reserve than to graze them on land which could be sown to crops.

Other men followed his lead. Water rights became of vital importance, bringing a mass of litigation which still clogs the courts of Nevada. Wheat became an item of importance in the life of the Valley and, with the thriftiness of the Basque, Angel had built a mill in which to grind the golden harvest. At best, it was a crude affair which the valley soon outgrew, but the old Basque did not hurry to replace it with a larger and better mill, for it was like him to have his investment guaranteed before making it.

A new mill would need more water. To make the mill profitable, the valley must produce a larger crop, and only more water could make that possible. And from where was this water to come? Martin Creek was the one unfailing source of supply, and from the Santa Rosas to the Little Humboldt every man with a water right was either using or selling the maximum number of inches allowed him by law. So Angel saw his mill standing idle if in the future some other crop should prove more profitable, for it would claim part of the water now being used in the irrigation of wheat.

Not only to guard against this, but to make some alliance that would guarantee him an even larger sowing, became his chief concern and for three months he had pursued it. Next to himself, the Circle-Z claimed the greatest number of inches. Taylor had leased his water rights in Martin Creek to Paradise ranchers, depending on the North Fork for his own supply.

And now a strange thing happened, for although it was popularly supposed that Thad Taylor would have nothing to do with

a sheepman, and a Basque in particular, he and Angel pooled their interests in Martin Creek. For although Thad's hatred for the Basque was long lived, it in no way matched his love of the dollar, and it seemed certain that the arrangement he had made with Angel would line his pockets. That the thing they proposed doing was unfair, and less than honorable, mattered not at all to either.

The men who had been leasing Thad's water were dependent on it. Whatever value was placed on their ranches was contingent on their being able to renew their leases. A ranch without water is about as worthless a thing as Nevada can boast.

Thad and Angel were well aware of this, and it was their intention to buy in these properties at their own figure, to put what they could of them to wheat and to divide the profits. It was this very business which had taken Angel to the Circle-Z this day and as Joseph, with the wounded lamb in his arms, started back to Thad Taylor's ranch house, Angel and Thad lingered over their supper.

Little Billy, in his day a round-up cook of some renown and now Thad's chef and man-at-arms in general, was bent on clearing the table. He slipped in whenever it seemed propitious and retrieved a dish or platter. Thad soon discouraged him, however, for he was an autocratic, overbearing old man steeped in having his own way.

With more tact, it is true, the old rancher had dismissed his granddaughter, for of all the creatures who trod the earth, Thad Taylor loved and feared none as he did Necia. Moreover, he knew that the business he was discussing with Angel would not pass muster in her eyes.

When they had finished their scheming, Thad called her in. She was beautiful in a spiritual sense, her young body—she was only twenty—without hint of voluptuousness. As she stood in the doorway, her head lightly poised, it seemed incredible that the day would ever come when the purely physical loveliness of her would dim the divine beauty of her questioning, sky-blue eyes. She held her lips slightly parted and Angel glanced at her expecting some bird-like note to issue from them.

Necia waited, however, for her grandfather to speak and, as he gathered up his papers, she glanced from him to Angel, appraising each in her own way, wondering what they had in common. The two men were of about the same age and shrewdness was written upon the face of each, but in no other way were they even remotely alike, for her grandfather was short, heavy—bald; his ruddy cheeks and rounded nose almost giving the lie to his severe, tight-lipped mouth. Angel was tall, cadaverous, angular, a great shock of iron-gray hair cascading over his high forehead.

Necia had heard him reviled many times, but in the four or five visits he had made to the Circle-Z she had found him courteous and patient. She had been raised, however, in a household where the Basque had been held no better than a Mexican—her mother, old Thad's daughter, had shared this view—and Necia found it difficult to overcome the prejudice.

Thad glanced at her apprehensively as he straightened up, for he had felt her scrutiny.

"Well, well, Necia," he exclaimed brusquely, as was his habit when trying to cover up, "I can tell you a secret now: We're goin' to have a real flour mill."

Necia smiled. "Meaning that some one has lost his water rights, eh?" she queried provokingly.

"Never you mind about that," Thad grinned. "Business is business. I'm no organized charity. Go on and play those new records for us, will you?"

Necia shook her head as she glanced at the wax rolls—in that day quite the last word in talking machine records.

"They are *terrible*, grandfather," she said teasingly. "—'The Bull Frog and the Coon'—'Flanigan's Wake'—" Necia made a wry face as she read the labels aloud.

"Terrible?" Thad snorted. "'Flanigan's Wake?' Why, when I was a young buck they wa'n't no better tune a goin' than that! But that's young folks for you!" he went on vehemently, pretending an anger he was far from feeling. "Old-time things ain't good enough for them no more."

"Maybe, that is best, eh *señor?*" Angel argued.

This was unexpected. Thad whirled on him in fine dudgeon.

"You a-goin' to take sides agin me, too?" he gasped. "Necia don't need no help. She bosses me to death now. I tell you, young folks has got too much imagination. They've got things all figured out in advance. Makes me feel obsolete."

"Oh, poor grandfather," Necia said mockingly as she perched herself upon the arm of his chair.

"See?" Thad protested. "The tyranny of the female—it's awful! You can't make them take you seriously. If you don't agree with them, they laugh at you. Why, for three weeks she's been tryin' to make believe there's a ragged, half starved, no good—"

"I did not say he was a 'no-good,'" Necia objected.

"No, you didn't. But if there was such a person, what else could he be—hidin' out on a mountain goin' around without shoes; hair down his back—playin' around with a handful of crippled sheep that he's picked up, God knows where! Bah! Do you think I'm mad?"

"Oh, so you've heard those tales, too, *señor?*" Angel inquired.

"Hain't heard nothin' else!" Thad exclaimed. "My boys don't talk about anythin' else. They say he's got a coyote herdin' his flock! D'you ever hear of anythin' so downright foolish? Grown up men ought to know better. If they're out at night and a coyote shuts up all of a sudden or a bob-cat quits his squawlin', they nudge each other and mutter, 'Joseph!' It makes me sick."

"And the crow, grandfather," Necia said tauntingly; "don't forget it."

"That's beyond me, that crow stuff," Thad declared helplessly. "I ain't even goin' to repeat that."

Necia smiled, but Angel's eyes were mirthless.

"My friend," he said after a moment's hesitation, "the tales you scoff at are true—even the crow."

"What?" Thad brought his chair down with a thud. Angel nodded.

"They are true," he repeated.

There was a convincing quality in the old Basque's voice. Thad knew he had heard the truth, and his mouth sagged as he stared speechlessly at the old Basque. Necia was less surprised, but her face grew sober as she and her grandfather waited for Angel to speak.

"He has been living on the mountain for months," their visitor went on after some deliberation.

"Have you seen him?" Thad demanded.

"I have seen his fires at night. One of my young men has seen him."

Thad whistled softly. "So that is why your boys went around by way of the spring, eh?"

"That is why, *señor,*" Angel answered, somewhat disconcerted. "You know Peter Organ—he has talked with this man."

"What did he have to say?"

Angel scowled and got up and reached for his hat. Suddenly turning and confronting Necia and her grandfather, he exclaimed excitedly:

"He threatens us with famine! He says our crops will fail, our herds die for want of water! *Mal rayo la parta!* (May an evil stroke of lightning smother him.) He says that the seven lean years are upon this valley as they were upon Egypt!"

Thad laughed loudly at this.

"The seven lean years, eh?" he queried sarcastically. "I guess you and me know that there's been lean years right along for those who look for them. Year in and year out we been here. We ain't done so bad. I reckon we'll git by. Lean years for lean heads! Quotin' the Bible to Peter, eh? I might a-known he was a religion-struck fool."

"Well—do you condemn him for warning you?" Necia asked.

"*Condemn* him?" Thad questioned. "Humph! What; a fool?"

Angel was standing at the window, staring out into the soft night.

"But, *señor,*" he murmured without turning, "this is the last day of May. It has not rained this month."

"Just a dry spring," Thad retorted. "You don't mean to tell me you take any stock in this wild talk?"

"It's strange—strange," Angel answered as much to himself as to Thad and Necia.

"Well, it's your land he's on," said Thad. "I wouldn't stand no foolishness from him. I'd make him git. You—you ain't *afraid* of him?"

Angel shook his head slowly.

"Joseph," he muttered only half aloud. "—Joseph! It spells power. *Jaincoa!* I hate that name."

Thad nodded, and patted Necia's hand.

"So do I," he said slowly. "I haven't forgotten. Why, I—I—" and as he paused to find a word he heard something scratching at the door. And as all three of them stared, the door opened and Slippy-foot stalked into the room.

Thad's eyes bulged. The coyote stopped and looked from one to the other of them. Angel, at the window, had thrown up his hand as if to ward off something evil, and he stood seemingly petrified, fear written upon his face. Even Necia trembled and drew back. Though no one of them had ever seen Slippy-foot before, the manner of her entrance chilled their blood.

CHAPTER XII.

NECIA.

A COYOTE walking into a ranch house! It was ghostly, unreal. Only a rangeman can appreciate the surprise and revulsion which successively swept over the two old men and Necia. Before they had recovered, the weird tap, tap, of something crossing the gravel outside the door reached their ears. The next instant, Grimm, black and sleek, strutted into the room with the mien of an archbishop.

Necia heard Angel gasp as he caught his breath. Her grandfather was having an equally hard time of it. Their apparent helplessness steadied rather than alarmed Necia, and she threw back her head bravely as she faced Grimm and Slippy-foot.

Grimm blinked his great gold-rimmed eyes as he surveyed the room and its occupants, and the wisdom and shrewdness that shone in them seemed to mock the petty schemes and secrets of the men before him. Crossing to where Angel stood, he humped his wings and, looking up at the Basque, he deliberately clacked his tongue, and the sound was not unlike a laugh. Angel winced, feeling that the great bird was peering into his very soul. Grimm continued to regard him solemnly for another three or four seconds. Turning, then, he hopped upon the table.

A bread crust caught his wandering gaze and, tearing it into bits, he ate it with relish; but, even as he ate, his eyes roamed continually from Angel to Thad. He had been in the room fully a minute, and in that time no one had spoken. Necia could not but wonder why he never glanced at her, and she could not repress a start when, without warning, he raised his wings and hopped upon her shoulder. At that instant some one called:

"Grimm!"

The crow cawed audaciously and sailed to the floor and, as he did so, Joseph reached the doorway. For some minutes, they had known he must come, and although Grimm and Slippy-foot had prepared them for his arrival, they could not take their eyes off him as he stood framed against the night, the wounded lamb in his arms. The lamp's mellow light glint against his tanned cheeks and accentuated the luster of his eyes.

A majestic dignity rested upon him as he glanced at each of them in turn. Necia felt it. The serenity which cloaked him made light of his ragged clothes, and the girl, urged by an impulse she little understood, took a step toward him. She would have spoken had not her grandfather recovered his tongue and, brushing her aside, cried out angrily:

"State your business!"

Joseph's face retained its placidity. A moment before he had recognized Angel, and though his surprise had been great at finding him here, he had not betrayed it. He properly supposed that the man who addressed him was Thad Taylor and knowing him to be, by reputation, an irascible old man, it pleased Joseph to answer him at his own pleasure.

"I have come to you for help," he said.

"Help?" Thad shouted. "Git that truck out of my house!" he raged, pointing to Slippy-foot and Grimm.

Joseph looked at Angel as if asking him if he concurred in this, and the expression on the old Basque's face well repaid the boy. Necia thought she saw his eyes smile as he motioned to the coyote.

"Go," he murmured.

Slippy-foot hesitated for a moment and she bared her fangs as she glared at Angel. Joseph lifted his hand then, and she slunk out.

"And you, Grimm," he said to the crow.

Grimm clacked his tongue sarcastically and, swaying from side to side, pattered across the floor and was gone.

Thad's sigh was one of relief.

"What's the meanin' of this?" he cried, and his voice sounded natural once more. "What do you want me to do for you?"

"For me—nothing. This lamb is suffering. I took it out of a trap a short while ago. Its leg is torn—it needs attention."

"Don't bring no sheep to me," Thad answered wrathfully, oblivious to Angel's presence. "I reckon that ain't the first lamb that's stepped into a trap."

"No, unfortunately; but we know about this one. This poor, stricken thing—the most helpless of all God's creatures—can not ask you for aid. I do that. And you—will not—refuse me."

"You ain't got nothin' else to do but run around gathering up crippled sheep, eh?" Thad asked insolently. "I hear you got most of your flock that-a-way. Why don't you take this one?"

"Because I believe it belongs to this man," and Joseph pointed to Angel. "I found it in the long *arroyo* below your fence."

Angel muttered something in Basque, but he did not offer to take the lamb. Joseph gazed at him, and saw that he trembled as if palsied.

"What—what is your business?" Angel asked with some hesitation.

"I am a shepherd," Joseph answered.

"Shepherd, eh?—a herder," growled Thad.

"And your range?" Angel insisted.

"Wherever I find it."

The Basque nodded to himself.

"Do you want work?" he asked.

Joseph shook his head.

"I have my work," he said slowly. "It is far from finished."

"Seven years of it yet, eh?" Thad questioned scornfully. "Seven lean years!—Huh!"

"They will come to pass!" Joseph declared with some heat.

"You can't preach religion to me," Thad shot back.

"I have no religion to preach," Joseph asserted, "and if I seem to have, it is more than I intend. I ask only that men do unto me as I do unto them. And meanwhile, this lamb suffers."

"I guess if you go around to the bunk house some of the boys will fix you up," Thad said by way of compromise, for in spite of himself he had begun to believe that Joseph possessed some mysterious power. The coyote—the crow—the boy's quiet confidence—his unwavering eyes—were combining to put a bit of fear into Thad's heart.

Necia had taken no part in the conversation and, as her grandfather had stormed at Joseph, she had retreated to the other side of the table. But her eyes had not left Joseph's face, and she came forward now on hearing him dismissed.

"Why, grandfather," she said disapprovingly, and Thad raised his eyebrows inquiringly; "we cannot send this boy out, looking for help from our men. I don't know of any one who would have bothered about the lamb. I—I think it was noble of him to bother with it. I want him to come in."

For a moment, Thad looked at her as if not comprehending what she had said. He was anxious to see Joseph gone.

"You orderin' me to do that?" he asked, his voice husky.

"I ask it, grandfather," Necia said simply. "This is your home, and we cannot serve it better than by proving that a stranger can find justice and gratefulness here."

Thad nodded a grudging consent as Necia paused. Then facing Joseph, she said:

"Will you come in? I will take care of the lamb. I am Necia Dorr."

It was Joseph's turn to fall back. His eyes widened as he gazed at her—so militant—so unafraid. But his was not a feeling of fear. It was more a sense of reverential awe which swept over him and robbed him of the power to take his eyes away from her. So a humble peasant might have stood before Jeanne d'Arc.

Thad and Angel caught the look in the boy's eyes, and they glanced at each other furtively. As they stared at him, they saw Joseph's eyes cloud.

"Necia Dorr?" he muttered to himself. Dorr—! Kit Dorr—Necia Dorr—the Circle-Z! Could he doubt but what this beautiful girl, with her tumbled blond hair, was Kit Dorr's daughter? Why it should matter so much he did not know, but his throat went dry at the thought and, with his senses fogged, he heard Necia say:

"If you will carry the lamb into the kitchen, I will dress its leg."

Thad and Angel got up and watched him as he followed Necia out of the room. A curse escaped Thad's lips as he sank back into his chair. Angel still stood staring at the door through which Joseph had disappeared. He muttered something to himself and, going to the table, he bent over and whispered in Thad's ear:

"Do you know who he is?"

Angel's voice was as cold as death and it and the look in his eyes made Thad pop erect as if he were a jack-in-the-box.

"Who?" he demanded.

Angel straightened up, his eyes holding Thad's.

"That," he said at last, nodding toward the kitchen, "is Joe Gault's boy."

CHAPTER XIII.

"VENGEANCE IS MINE."

JOSEPH stood by silently as Necia cut away the wool from the lamb's torn leg; and save for holding the lamb while she washed the wound with a disinfectant, he found nothing he could do to help her. In a few minutes she had the injured leg bandaged. Joseph's desire for speech had never been greater, but a strange reticence gripped him, and now as Necia looked up at him, he could only ask her to allow him to put the lamb in Angel's rig which stood hitched outside.

"I think you have done enough already," Necia declared. "It was a fine thing to do. No wonder wild animals follow you around. I think I know why. But—have you had anything to eat?"

Joseph nodded and answered briefly:

"Before I left the mountain."

"It is a long way for one afoot. If you are going up the mountain yet to-night, I will loan you a horse."

"No—I will walk," Joseph replied uneasily, at a loss for words with which to express his gratitude for her thoughtfulness. "It is late—I will put the lamb in the rig—it is little enough to do—and go."

He was ill at ease, and he wondered if she suspected as much. He had no desire to end this moment with her, but he realized he had done no less, for Necia raised her eyebrows inquiringly and, picking up the lamb, handed it to him.

"It *is* getting late," she said softly.

There was nothing further to keep Joseph now, and he started to turn away, his eyes solemn. He paused as Necia said:

"If you—should ever come to the Circle-Z again, grandfather will treat you differently. He—is not heartless." A roguish twinkle came into her eyes as she hesitated momentarily. "I—I hope you will not find it too far to come again," she finished.

The fragrance of her hair swept into Joseph's nostrils as she opened the door for him. It was clean, invigorating, not unlike the perfume of young balsams in early spring. It shook him, and harking back to the speech of his boyhood, he said simply:

"I reckon I could find my way."

His sincerity and his use of the homely expression made Necia smile tenderly.

"You *reckon* you could, eh?" she trilled.

Both were young and keenly alive, and they laughed softly together.

"You are—a stranger," Necia said

prettily. You—might give me your name—"

Joseph found her very alluring as her eyes dared him to answer while he hesitated, torn between the desire to tell her and the fear of cutting himself off from her forever if he did. To tell her that his father had not killed hers would be only to invite questions—to prove his words—and the time for that was not yet. And then, wisdom whispered to him that this girl must find out the truth for herself. So he said only:

"Joseph."

"Just—Joseph?" Necia whispered.

He did not reply, nor did he catch the wistful light that crept into her eyes. He knew she was waiting for him to answer, and he nodded his head unhappily.

"Just—Joseph," he said, repeating her words, and his voice was strange to his own ears.

"That sounds very mysterious," she went on after a moment; "almost as if—as if it explained your presence in Nevada."

"You mean that I withhold my name from you because there is a blot on it?" Joseph asked, misunderstanding Necia's inference.

"No—no; not that," she hastened to answer. She felt his eyes searching her own, and she colored as she struggled for words with which to express her thought. She stiffened as the boy said flatly:

"But this *is* my reason."

Necia stared at Joseph, trying to read his secret. She shook her head at last and smiled faintly.

"An injustice—a wrong! Something you are going to avenge—" she murmured, and then:

"I think that is exactly what I meant—not that you had come here to hide."

Joseph glanced at her shrewdly.

"Why—why do you think that?" he asked.

"I sensed it the moment you came in. Your speech is strange; you are hardly one of us—and yet, as you faced Señor Irosabal, I saw revenge flash in your eyes for a brief second. Your face was cruel. I even thought he cowered. He is a powerful man; and he has made many enemies."

Thoroughly disturbed by Necia's train of thought, the boy turned away, his eyes veiled.

"See—your face is hard now," she murmured. "I have guessed the truth."

Joseph did not reply. Unconsciously, Necia placed her hand upon his arm.

"Does it mean so much to you?" she asked.

"Everything," Joseph nodded quietly.

"I might have known you would say that. I am sorry—truly. Revenge is so hopeless. It can bring you no happiness."

Her voice suddenly sounded sad. Joseph glanced up quickly, but Necia was looking beyond him at the great moon floating so lazily above the dim crest of distant Buckskin.

"You say that very positively," he said.

Necia nodded.

"My own life has proved it," she murmured, her voice trailing off into a whisper. "My grandfather never forgets or forgives a wrong. From childhood, I seem to see him as always having been bent on righting the wrongs men had done him. He has never quite caught up with his revenge. I wonder, sometimes, if he realizes that he has no friends. Hardly any one comes here. It is very lonely—I feel it. We are never asked about. Men say that no one has ever got the best of grandfather—I wonder what else they say of him." Necia's thoughts wandered for a moment.

"If he had only forgiven one or two," she went on, "he would have had friends today. He needs them. But he'll not change. That you find a Basque in his home, after all his years of hating them, does not mean that he has changed. Angel Irosabal brings him a profit. Grandfather has sworn his life to hating sheep and sheepmen—the Basques in particular—and he will go to his grave dreaming of avenging some wrong they did him. And yet, to my knowledge, it has been twelve years since a herder has infringed on him. My own father was killed in a fence fight—a victim of this very spirit of revenge."

"Your father—Kit Dorr?" asked Joseph.

Necia's eyes came back to the boy.

"You knew him?" she questioned.

"I have heard men speak his name.

You bear no malice toward the man who shot him?"

"I don't know. I suppose, even after all these years, that the sight of him would fill my heart with hatred. But I would try to forgive him. But I haven't kept him before me—I haven't thought about him. And I guess that sums up just what I am trying to say to you—that it is an affront to God to brood over an injustice, to keep it ever before you—alive and growing until you become its slave."

Necia's voice had risen, and she stopped, surprised at herself.

"I hadn't meant to say quite that," she said humbly. "Forgive me."

But Joseph had been deeply stirred, and he gave no sign that he heard her now.

"I have tried to keep hatred out of my heart!" he exclaimed earnestly, "for the dead cannot be avenged through hate. But I *have* come back to right a great wrong, and I will not beturned aside. I ask only justice. That will I have."

"But justice that demands an eye for an eye is often less than justice."

"And yet, I shall demand no less." His voice was determined, almost sullen in its intensity. "At this moment, I hold the lives and happiness of those who have wronged me and mine in my hand. I can crush them as you would crush an egg shell. As easily as that!"

Joseph had put out his hand, and Necia held her breath as she watched his fingers close until the nails sank into his flesh.

"And still—I have yet to raise my hand against any man. 'Vengeance is mine,' the Lord has said, and I do not intend to presume with Him. But if I do—if because I see in myself the messenger of His will—I will fail. Beyond all else, I am true to myself. No one can alter my purpose. Whenever opportunity has offered, I have never failed to do a man a favor. I have given all, and asked nothing."

"And already you have your reward," Necia declared. "Men who scoffed at you now respect you. You have made friends, whether you know it or not. You could do the people of this valley a wonderful service."

"I have," Joseph answered simply "I have warned them. But they have not listened, even though the signs are everywhere. Not in fifty years has this valley been without water, so they see in me only a fanatic—a preacher of religion, your grandfather called me."

"But grandfather respects you. He does not know that he does, but—he does. When you spoke to him, he knew that he heard the truth. There—he is calling me—you will come again?"

"I may—have to," Joseph murmured with peculiar emphasis. Necia glanced at him questioningly.

"Have to?" she queried.

Joseph nodded.

"Your grandfather has never recalled the reward he offered for the capture of the man who killed your father. I may decide to claim it."

Necia drew back in surprise.

"You know where to find him?" she asked eagerly.

"He has never been away. He is not the man you suspect."

Thad had been standing beside Angel's buggy, waiting, and he started toward the side door now to find out what kept Necia. She heard him approaching, and she put her hand upon Joseph's arm again, touching him lightly.

"Tell me his name," she demanded. Her voice trembled.

"Not to-night," Joseph answered. "He is a brute and a bully—a coward. He shot your father in the back."

Necia's eyes flamed as Joseph spoke. Her face was as stern as his own, now.

"If I reveal his identity," he went on, "it will cost him his life. You think it over. If you can tell me when you see me again, that you forgive him—that you do not demand that he pay for what he has done—I will give you his name."

Horror crept into Necia's eyes as she realized what he proposed.

"I understand you perfectly," she flared back. "You ask me to prove myself wrong—you make it very, very hard for me."

Her tone stabbed Joseph, and he was about to speak when her grandfather reached the door.

"He's got a long drive ahead of him," Thad said petulantly, indicating Angel. "Let him git started."

Together they walked to the rig, and Joseph placed the lamb in it. The light streaming through the open door revealed Slippy-foot, the coyote, and Grimm, the crow, standing side by side, an oddly assorted pair of sentinels, so still that it was hard to believe they lived.

Necia glanced at them and saw their eyes shine as the light struck them. The crow was rolling his sinister orbs, alive to every movement of those before him. She tried to turn away, but Grimm held her fascinated. He looked for all the world like some high executioner come, not only to judge, but to punish those who were offensive to him.

She caught her breath as she felt those great eyes resting momentarily upon her. Angel and Thad were caught up and held in turn, too.

"Will you ride with me?" the old Basque asked Joseph, his voice betraying his uneasiness. He addressed the boy, but his question was really put to Grimm, and as he waited for Joseph to answer he did not take his eyes off the crow.

It appeared to Necia that Joseph hesitated as if expecting the somber bird to answer Angel. Suddenly she saw the crow spread his wings. A piercing, raging "C-a-w-w-w, Caw-w-w-w!" shattered the stillness, and with a sweeping rush Grimm sailed into the air.

Necia threw up her arm to shield her face as she saw him pause on high and drop like a plummet. But it was down on Angel that the cawing fury swooped.

The old Basque cowered in his rig, apparently unable to reach out for his whip. His team, however, had heard that rush of angry wings, and with a wild snort the horses lowered their heads and dashed away.

Necia saw Angel awaken from his trance and grasp the reins. A few seconds later, man and team were lost in the night.

Old Thad was still searching the sky for a sight of Grimm. The crow's cries were rapidly growing faint in the distance. Thad listened, straining his ears until that wild cawing no longer reached him.

He looked for Joseph, but the boy and Slippy-foot had gone. He turned to Necia, then, and they stood and stared at each other almost as if expecting to find that that strange trinity—Joseph, Slippy-foot and Grimm—had left some visible mark on them.

Without speaking they entered the house. Thad threw open the doors and windows. Necia followed him with her eyes, wonder growing in them as she saw her grandfather give way to his rising anger.

"I want air! *Air*—do you hear? Open up everythin'! Git the smell of them things out of here," he raged.

The plate that Grimm had touched with his bill in salvaging the bread crust caught Thad's eyes. With an oath he picked it up and hurled it to the floor.

"Grandfather!" Necia protested.

"He ate out of it—that damned crow!" Thad shouted.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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BRASS COMMANDMENTS

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

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Cave Man Stuff

By KENNETH MacNICHOL

THEM was the days. But, in the words of a great man, now they just ain't no more.

In them days the Columbia Carnival Company was on the road. Class to that name, eh? Pete picked it himself. It was Pete Girston's show.

I don't mean to say that Pete was any king of the movies. Maybe a few slant-eyes way off in the jungle ain't never heard of Pete. But they ain't in the business. There was a time when you could say Pete to any trooper, and they'd think Girston like Yale and Harvard or knife and fork.

When you think what Pete done to the carnival game—he made it. He took it when it was a cross between a hold-up and a dog fight, and dolled it up with class till it was safe to take sister. Class was Pete's middle name. He invented that gag, no contracts and no concessions, and put the first show on the road that owned every pitch on the lot.

His people worked on paid salary and a rake-off on what they drew. No strong arm stuff ever got over with Pete. Where we made a set we could always go back again. It was all straight, and after we left a burg, we left it clean. That goes both ways—a clean getaway for us, and them hick towns would have to put in a hurry call to the next village to lend them some chicken feed. We left them crying for a dime. We took everything but the bank, and we left that crippled. We didn't need any rough stuff. Working with Pete we grabbed the works without.

Not, understand, that he was any board of censors. I'll say we carried some pretty rough babies sometimes. But Pete smoothed them down.

He had three commandments: keep

booze off the lot; get the kale; don't leave any boob sore. The bird that busted any one of the three got the hook.

The Columbia Carnival Company carried all the old fronts, glass blowers, rope-walk, hoola, anaconda, freaks, minstrels, the whole layout: scads of free shows, high dive, parachute drop, and all that—and a mob of pitch artists with picked ballyhoo boys, houpla, ring-pitch, ball-pitch, crack-louie, wheel of fortune, Jap lottery, dolls, rifles, baby rack, and some new stunt every season on top of that. Once it was Borneo Fire Dancers from Sixth Avenue—vaudeville stuff worked over. Pete was the first to take a bunch of diving girls on the road. One season we carried an eight-girl tab show, took an hour to run. Some thought Pete was feeble when he started with that.

Pete figured different. Let the simps set for an hour was the way he doped it out. Let them get rested up. They got time to get rid of all they got with us doing a week's stand. They'll think they're saving coin holding down a bench with their janes—spend twice as easy when they come out again.

That shows what kind of a bean Pete had. He used it. Always worked out stuff like that in advance.

With such a big push we had to hit all big time, dumps of fifteen or twenty thousand where the picking was good. But Pete could pick them: conventions, fairs, Elk and Eagle shows, anything to bring the alfalfa rooters in. He could smell a frost across three States and walk around it where the hoofing was good. Wherever we set we found a mitt full of grands.

Yes, them was the days. I get to riffling when I start to think about Pete. He was king of the grafters, and I can't go stronger than that. But this ain't his story.

I started to tell about a mutt we had with the show, one of the freaks, strong man, strong all over except above the ears. There he stopped. He was a shade more low brow than a big trained baboon. His muscles stuck out in lumps, and he had a beezer on him to make you cry for the human race. He lifted weights and done stunts. They used to drive a loaded auto or a wagon up on a couple of planks laid across his legs and chest, him flat on his back. It never hurt him none. There is a little trick in it, but with that it ain't no pastime for a guy that's got weak lungs.

Greek, he was. Back name was Nikopapadopolous; front name was worse'n that. We called him Sam, account of Samson of Judea, show name, painted up on the front where he worked. It was a swell painting of a man wrestling a lion, but that hadn't nothing to do with the show. This Sam took in good money, but his strength, like I said, petered out when it come to brains.

I mentioned his face? He carried a map like a cartoonist's idea of the gink they label war. You couldn't believe it to see it, and then you'd want to go away and try to forget it was true. There was something human about it, but it took more'n three guesses to say just what it was. Jaw like the front of a truck, and his mush sloped back from that till the top of his head was all gone away. Quiet enough, though; harmless, like a sleeping gorilla. Sometimes you find them that way.

That thing fell in love. He fell for a skirt anyway. Imagine it! Beauty and—no, I'll not spring that old one. Mina wasn't no real beauty; just a fair to middling looker, beefy blonde with two fist, heavy-weight, about like a load of hay. She was married too; attached to a piece of cheese name of Simpson, little skate handling a peanut and pop corn lay. They was a scream as a couple. She hounded him awful and it seemed like he was scared stiff to talk up to her. It was her Sam fell for; she took him like a disease. But that wasn't all what happened. Bunt Simpson, Mina, and Sam—them three crabbed the show.

This here love thing worked on Sam like a barrel of moonshine at a colored camp meeting. He got mean, and when I say mean I mean mean. He had it all in him; it just started leaking out. We had been a happy family, and all of a sudden—blooey! Count ten—and it's all over till the papers come out with the loser's alibi. Bing! Like that, and the sky falls. That was Sam falling in love. He hell hard. Then it was good night after a glorious day.

Mina made change for the glass blowers, and when the ballyhoo boy had steered in a tent full, she run the raffle inside. I will say for her that when she was on the job she had a smile that was worth millions. Maybe she's throwed one of them loose smiles at that big ape just to keep in practice when nobody else was in sight. But after that to see him crying around after her you'd think he was following the funeral of all his relations, and they hadn't left him a cent.

Sweet Mary! It was awful! Mind it from the start Sam had as much chance of making a hit with that dame as a simp has to win a twenty buck plaster on a ring pitch. But he couldn't see it that way; he was short on brains. So one night he pulls some wise crack and tries to make her when she was beating it away from the lot. Mina knocks the big stiff for a goal, and tells where he gets down after that.

"Wake up!" she says. "Come to life! You got a nerve trying to get fresh with a lady, and you with that mess you've got where you call it a face! Be a man if you got it in you, and lay off lamping me around. That sick Willy business, neither your amateur rough stuff, gets across any with me!"

That done it. Be a man, she told him, and what did he know about something he wasn't, and didn't have it in him to be? Be a man! Him, that had been scared to talk out loud for fear somebody might call him mean names, he gets the only idea he ever had, which is to go bump somebody. Which same he does.

Here's Butch Anderson, spieler for the anaconda, comes in on the tail end of the performance. He gets an earful when Mina gives Sam the razz. Being gifted that way for slinging a nasty tongue, he hands it to Sam:

"Wowie! What a jab! Now you know—"

Poor Butch! Sam never did like him much. That big gorilla cuts loose, which he ain't never done before. There's a wreck and an earthquake and a massacre, and about a week after Butch wakes up and asks which way the herd of elephants went when they'd ruined him.

"I'm telling it, though, that week Butch was dreaming we wasn't wasting any feelings on him. We was too busy. That Greek cyclone had got wise. He'd found his strength was good for something besides wrestling cannon balls. The discovery tickled him stiff. Which is just the way we wasn't, being in the same show.

There's Jinky Collins owes this husky ten beans. The longer he owes it the less it gives him a pain. Sam bones him the morning after he slaughtered Butch.

"I want that ten," he says quiet enough.

Jinky starts the usual: "I ain't got it this morning. You better see me again the end of the week."

Sam seen him right then. He up-ends him, and shakes everything out of him he's got, then dumps him down by a tent. Jinky hollers, while Sam gathers in what he wins. Jinky claims Sam robs him of sixty iron men with his ticker and slang. Sam explains careful that he couldn't took nothing, because Jinky said he hadn't nothing to take. That was some argument. Sam puts his foot on Jinky and says he'll push it if Jinky don't fasten his face.

Seems to us like that's funny. We laugh all afternoon. In the evening Sam frames a knockout on Larry Ronstein, the spieler for the Circassian Beauties from the Bronx. That's because Larry calls him for shooting gab at the girls.

That wasn't so funny. We don't know where it 'll stop. Quite a bunch got theirs before the end of the week. By that time we walked around that stiff. He had everything we didn't want, and he passed it around real free. One night Sam beat up Blinker Thompson just claiming that Blink had got in his way. Some of us hollered to Pete Girston.

"Crown him," says Pete. "What do you rough-necks let him run over you for? If one can't do it, gang up on him."

We tried it—once. Six of us. With tent pegs. The casualties was two busted arms and a collar bone. None of them belonged to Sam. There'd been more only three of the push beat it after Spider Dolan went out and Pink Weitzner bumped the ground with his beezer when he bounced off the top of a tent.

Crown him! Hot baby! Gentle amusement like kissing a crocodile or taking samples of whiskers a man-eating lion likes to wear under his chin! Something simple, like walking in front of a subway express and whispering stop!

All this time that big bruiser pays no attention to Mina. Why? Ask me. I won't tell you. Maybe he's too busy being a man. So Mina begins to take some notice of him. He strolls around looking cheerful, knocking us for a row. Mina meets him one morning, gives him one of them gold plated smiles, and says: "Good morning, Mr. Sam." It made him feel fine. About noon we carted Tim Kelly off to the hospital. Tim run the engine for the merry-go-round. Mina had slipped another good morning to him.

Yes, them three crabbed the show. It was worse than that. It looked like there wasn't going to be any show. Sam was putting the whole works in hock. Them ballyhoo boys got so they was scared to holler out loud, for fear they'd say something Sam didn't like and he'd hear them. In which case Sam never cared how soon he let us know.

What Bunt Simpson was thinking all this time wasn't important. Maybe he wasn't thinking anything excep. to keep out of Sam's path, same as the rest of us. He was plenty busy with his peanut and popcorn stand.

Sam gets a new idea. When he ain't got a yen to work he don't work. He quits the pitch and goes over passing the gas with Mina. That stops her business. Maybe she likes it. We don't none of us know. Sam talks, not that he's got any swell line of conversation. Mina listens. A sample gets handed around by the glass blower's ballyhoo man:

"Mr. Sam," says Mina, "you'd ought to see that I'm busy. When I'm working you oughtn't to come hanging around this way."

Sam looks at her through the window of the ticket booth, smiles mean, and says:

"Shut up, if that's all you got to say to me."

He goes on talking, throwing the bull about what a great man he is. And Mina takes it. Why? Say, why is a woman? What makes them goofy? How do they get that way? If anybody knows, they know the book. Sam is hipped on Mina. But it would take a looloo to be hep to what's fussing the frail to make her stand for him. Pick the first hunch and it's thirteen and the odd you guess wrong.

It don't help to dope it hearing Mina throw the hook into Bunt, who dares tell her he'd be better pleased if that big gee stayed further away.

"If you was half a man," she tells Bunt, "you'd tell him yourself. But before you'd do that you'd let him insult me all day. If you was a man instead of—"

No use going any further with that. Then that's married has heard it. Them that ain't hadn't ought to be discouraged so soon.

Anyway Bunt, maybe, gets to thinking that over. There's a gag about hooch that gives a rabbit nerve to spit in a wildcat's face. Bunt must of drunk some. Or maybe he wanted to die quick, being tired of living in misery with Mina making a sap out of him. In three or four days here he goes up to Sam, his knees banging together the way they like to broke his legs.

"I want," he says, "that you would keep away from my wife!"

Sam looks at him with his jaw dropped down. He hears it, but he don't believe it. There ain't nobody lately give him any gab like that.

"You want—" Sam says.

"You got to keep away from Mina," Bunt gets out.

"Who says so?"

"I do! I got a right, ain't I?"

"You got a right to get your can knocked off," Sam tells him. "You better go away!" He gives Bunt a push, and goes right on talking. "Go on away." Then he pushed him some more. "I don't want to hit you." Push! "I'd ought to spoil you"—push—"but I want to save you"—push—"to play with when I'm felling punk some day!" Push!

Every time Sam shoves, Bunt goes back about ten feet. Sam follows him up and shoves again. Bunt ends up sitting in a puddle alongside of the tank wagon. And

after a while Bunt raises himself and walks it too.

He didn't look mad or nothing, y'understand; just sort of dizzy. He carried that look around with him two-three days stepping wide and careful whenever Sam was exploring around on the lot. A clam was a calliope them days compared with him. He could say nothing longer and quieter than anybody you didn't ever hear. Maybe he was thinking. Maybe he was only remembering what Mina says to him last time and the time before that, which was a hatful if he kept it all in his head. Or maybe he was just listening for Mina to bust loose again.

"You'd think it was her had been stepped on. She said enough for two. She said enough for a harem, and a few dozen odd throwed in. Bunt heard everything she ever knew about him. Maybe a half of one per cent of what she thought she knew might have been true. If any more of it had been we could of made an exhibit of Bunt—"Bobo, the wonder; the man without a spine—drop a pea in a hole at the back of his neck and hear it rattle all the way down—yellow all over, including hair, teeth, and the whites of his eyes—a thin dime to observe the smallest human insect ever displayed for the instruction and amusement of an amazed public!" And if we could of kept Mina going we wouldn't needed any other spieler than her.

Bunt took that, too, laying down, and standing up, and wherever he happened to be at the time. He got more attention out of Mina than he'd had for years, and he'd never wanted it less. And whenever she wasn't hammering the ear of her lawful husband with hard words, she was talking to Sam, the big stiff, or listening like a mesmerized hen while he made his brags to her. Only thing good about it was Sam had kind of laid off on us. For a while he was real good natured—for him.

It's funny, ain't it, how women can be so different? Here's Bunt, a decent little skate never doing no harm to nobody, that she had a right to cherish and protect, and her making him sorry his mother hadn't throwed him away. And, Sam, that needed killing—only we didn't have it in us to do it—with a mug he'd ought to wore a veil over it, and her filling his tin ears full of mush. Him, that never was anything but feeble from the neck up, getting simpler every day, thinking his rough stuff was getting over strong with that peroxide frail. Can you beat it? What her big idea was anybody could guess a hundred times and just that many times they'd be wrong.

Sam has gone goofy, even forgetting to beat up more than one or two of us in a week. And Mina playing wink-um with that half-civilized dynamite. And Bunt, the mutt, not even beefing at the performance. He lamps the whole show, and makes a noise like a deaf and dumb beggar, thankful if he don't draw no big attention to him. It's that there same triangle thing that gets the rich in the papers. It can't last, and it don't.

I'll say it don't! We hear, like somebody is always slipping around such information, that Sam is teasing Mina to beat it with him. Though what he'd be running from, and for what, that ain't explained. He's got everything his own way where he is, and how he'd get past anywhere except in a freak show, he ain't got brains enough to look ahead that far. He don't know his pay stops when he quits. Anyway, Mina don't fall for it. Maybe she ain't real wise to Sam's vacuum system in the head, but she can't help knowing that ain't no face to take anywhere. And sometimes a married husband is a convenience, even if he is a poor shrimp like Bunt. Even such as him is a help to talk at when a lady's feelings is hurt, or any time when she feels like spilling a mouthful into an ear that's hooked up so it can't wander away. She sticks with the show. That makes Sam wild, which, that week, there was eight casualties among the troops. It was pretty tough for us, but we couldn't blame Sam. It must be a mean feeling when you've got the world flat against the ropes and gasping for air—and you hear there ain't no prize to follow the applause. Sam had paid his money, but there wasn't going to be no show. So he starts in to wreck the ticket wagon, quite natural.

When he hollers to Mina, Mina gives him the razz. The more he yawps, the more

soft words he draws, but that's all. Mina, maybe, is kind of enjoying herself. If it was fun to make one man climb a tree when she shook her stick, it must have been twice as much to see two of them running rings around her. Anyway, she don't show no intention of stopping the merry dance. Bunt, he sells peanuts and pop corn, like there was no three-cornered problems had any interest for him.

Some women is natural that way—like kids playing with matches, and the closer they camp to a nitro-glycerine factory, the more fun it is. It gives them a thrill like there ain't nothing else like it. They're always surprised when they tear loose an explosion that busts right in their faces. And, believe me, this gorilla Sam, even if he was goofy, wasn't no penny firecracker that sizzles and fades away. When he got to the blowing-up point, we looked for the world to come to a sudden end.

We was all going around in sneakers for fear we'd make a sudden noise that might jar him loose. Sam almost quits shooting off his face on the lot, and that's a mean sign. Mina still shoots a wicked smile, like Sam's feelings wasn't destroying no sleep for her. Bunt wasn't no more than a shadow. Some days you couldn't hardly see him at all. And Pete Girston, him that could have stopped the works in two minutes by making one slice at the pay of all three, he was keeping away from the lot as much as he could. Every time he showed up, some of the boys that Sam had abused was sure to back him up against a tent and spill a bucket of woe. That wasn't like Pete. We couldn't figure his game no way we piped the lay.

Pete was the best hand at minding his own business we'd ever seen. He was minding it so good that a fair part of it, meaning us, was like to be ruined without him having a word to say. We might have knowed Peter better, but it seemed to stack up that way.

Pete wasn't worried none about Sam beating us up; there wasn't no hospital bills being paid by him. But he did notice Sam was laying down on the job. That was bad business. Sam was walking all over the lot for pleasure whenever he wanted to stretch his crooked legs. There ain't no boob that's simple enough to pay two bits to look at a freak when the freak gives them a free show, even without trimmings, by parading around outside of the front. The second week that the money from the Samson tent took a zero skid Pete gives this hyena a ballout before the bunch.

That week we was pitched in a corn belt dump where the Wows was giving a bean feast, trying to pay for a wooden, two-story skyscraper where they could go to get away from the women at home. In them hick towns, no matter how much excitement there is after the cows is fed and the chickens milked, nothing ever busts open much before noon. It was about ten o'clock, before the first opening, Sam picks his time to take a stroll. And Pete, he waylays Sam. Talks quiet, as if Sam was listening to talk after being in training the way he'd been. It happens out in front of the Samson tent.

"Sam," says Pete, pleasant, "the last two weeks you ain't been pulling good. Last week was a hundred counters less than the week before. What are we going to do about it?"

"Nothing," says Sam, with a nasty look in his eye. "What you expect me to do?"

"Keep your ugly mug back of the front," says Pete. "So you don't scare the rubes cold before they pay to see what an awful mush a mutt can have and still live."

"That's my business," says sulky Sam, him with not sense enough to know he's being insulted.

"Wrong," says Pete. "It's my business, and it ain't so good as I want it. Which if it ain't better this week, you wander down the road."

"Fire me?" asks Sam, beginning to see red.

"You're a good guesser," says Pete. He figures the conversation is closed. Sam roars:

"You fire me! Can't—try it—try it—I tell you—try it—"

That's Sam's idea of a snappy comeback. Pete gives him a calm once-over like he was a tent pole or something.

"All I say is, stay in that tent to-day till I tell you to pull on your pants and

quit. And no rough stuff! Pull any on me, and I'll knock you so far you'll be a week crawling back. I know you're thick, but I guess you can get that, eh, Sam?"

Sam goes crazy with what he's got in his head.

"You fire me! You want fight, eh? You talk too much—you try! I lick you right now—"

He starts for Pete with his head dropped like a battling bull. Pete puts one hand in his coat pocket, but he don't move a step.

"Sam!" he yells sudden.

This strong guy sort of hesitates and looks up, him being in the habit of doing his best work when he gets a guy on the run. Somehow Pete don't look like he knew the steps.

"Sam," says Pete, "we ain't fighting to-day. I don't aim to bother with no chunk of cheese. But I pack a gun for mad dogs, and the first move you make I'll show you how a nutmeg grater got so it looks that way." He was talking real nice, but it wasn't a pleasant sound. "Come on, now, Sam, and get punctured. There's a nice, quiet grave in this burg just waiting for you. They don't charge no more when they make them big. What are you waiting for, Sam? Come on, and get killed, nice and friendly, and I'll have you planted under a willow tree. You've got enough pay coming—and you won't need it, you being dead that way."

Sam stares like one of these hypnotized ginks at Pete's finger, which makes a nasty, wiggling kind of a bulge in the side pocket of his coat. The big gimmick gulps once or twice, but don't show no special anxiousness to step up and be killed. Then he gets a bright idea—for him.

"I quit!" he says, not so loud as he yelled before.

"I thought so," says Pete. "Get into that tent, and don't show your flat map outside it the rest of the day."

"I quit now—I quit you—I quit the show—I don't stay no more—" yapps Sam, trying to make himself clear. Pete never batted an eye.

"Thanks," he says. "And if you're not off the lot in fifteen minutes, and out of town by to-night, to-morrow morning you'll look worse yet than you do to-day."

Pete was a great man. He'd kept Sam's number when the rest of us had throwed it away. But Sam wasn't finished. With his nerve and no sense he'd tried to swim the Atlantic thinking it ended at Coney and he'd get a lift going across.

Here he goes now, after Pete has messed up his feelings, beating it to the women's dressing tent. In the show-shop, that's a hanging offense.

Mina was in there. That's all he needed to know. He busted in like a wild man. Two or three of the janes that was dolling up to get out on the job said afterwards he wasted no looks at them. Just the same they started yelling like they'd found a herd of porch climbers under the bed. Mina was sitting down by her box putting on her face for the day. Sam rushes up and grabs her under the arm.

"You come by me—" he says.

Mina just gives one yell, and looks around for a weapon to bean him with.

"Get out of here, you big stiff!" she hollers. "You turn me loose! You'll get the can for this!"

"I'm quit," he says stubborn. "I leave the show—you got to pack up and come."

"I see myself!" says Mina. "Ain't you got any decency, busting in here?"

Sam's got one idea, and he can't get away from it none.

"You come with me! Me, I don't go alone! You come now quiet, or—"

Whango! Mina lifted up the trunk tray and busts it over his bean. Sam shakes his head, brushes the splinters off from his shoulders, and jounces the frame down on the ground. He makes a pass at Mina and lifts her off her feet. She wasn't no feather, at that. She claws like a cat, yelling twice as loud as before. She'd of spoiled his face, if there was anything could—kicks hard enough to bust in the side of a barn. Sam starts with her like he aimed to carry her the rest of the week.

"Bunt!" she howls before even they're outside. "Bunt!"

What do you know about that? Her that's been hounding him, the poor tripe, till he's thin as a hair, yelling for him to save

her from this here man-eating baboon what busts up two-fisted scrappers like they was job lots of eggs. And this Sam frothing at the mouth he's that wild, slamming across the lot just as if he knew what he was going to do with that frail. Bunt steps in his path.

"Oh, Bunt, hit him with something!" she wails. What sort of a hope did she think he had?

But he does it. Not saying nothing, he does it, with a rock that's about all the weight he can heave. It takes Sam in the neck, and just makes him a little wilder than what he was before. He drops the jane and makes a bull rush at Bunt.

Bunt runs. Well, what would anybody do that had brains? Them that Bunt had he wasn't crazy to lose. He's a good runner, Bunt is, and he had a fair head start of Sam.

By that time we're all turned out—not that we know what to do—and it seems like Bunt's time has come.

Bunt is splitting the air toward his peanut and popcorn stand. Sam gains on him fast. Mina sits where she's been dropped, having the strikes on the ground. Two or three of the girls which has forgot they ain't ready to show yet is trying to pick Mina up, but they ain't got the same strength as Sam.

Once I saw a big ape in the movies reach out and snatch a man. That's what is about to happen to Bunt. He is pretty close to his stand, but there ain't nothing to climb up on or get under there. Still, it looks like he's trying. He's maybe got thirty seconds of life ahead of him when he starts clawing up on the counter and reaching down like he's taking a header behind. All of a sudden he kicks loose and comes up again.

Then we seen it. There was a shotgun in Bunt's hand. Sam is maybe fifteen feet away when Bunt throws down on him and turns loose with the gun. It takes Sam in the middle.

We hadn't been looking to see no murders done. Not even if that hard boiled thug did have it coming to him. We didn't have time to figure it out that Sam was fixing to lay little Bunt out cold when Bunt got in first. Anyway Sam stops, roaring as loud as the gun. He straightens up and keeps coming. Bunt makes the gun talk again.

Hell has tore loose. That second shot knocks all the roar out of Sam. But all of us is yelling at Bunt, and Mina makes as much noise as all the rest of the outfit. Sam is down on his knees, and starts crawling away. Then he staggers to his feet and gets running.

"Just for luck!" howls Bunt, who seems to have gone off his bean. He's jammed another shell into that squaw gun, and let's drive again.

That Sam had more life in him than seven wild cats. Kill him? Say, when that third wad takes him in the back he cuts loose a yell like a lion if an elephant happened to step on its tail—makes one dive under the water wagon—comes up on the other side—smashes into a tent—takes down a whole row of bob-wire fence on the far side of the lot, and smashes down forty dollars' worth of nice corn stalks when he come to a field where it looked like he could hide away. No man ever did run till this Sam showed us how fast a gink that's been murdered can make a swift get-away.

And Bunt laughs. Yes, sir, he laughs like a fool with that shotgun still in his hands until Mina chokes him off with both arms throwed around his neck. She tells him things he ain't never heard before. She gets mushy. He's all the heroes there is. He's her pet and her blue-eyed baby savior—she even manages to find a new line or two.

"You're disgraceful!" says Bunt. "Go on back in that tent and put on some decent clothes."

And she goes! Just like that!

"Somebody," says Pete, as soon as he got over being surprised, "had better go dig Sam's corpse out of that corn field before some Rube trickles along with a bill of damage to pay. And the best thing you can do, Bunt, is to beat it, unless you aim to give yourself up to the cops right away."

"What for?" asks Bunt, meek enough talking to Pete.

"Why, for killing that mutt. You needn't be leery. We'll all say it was self-defense."

"I ain't worrying none," says Bunt.

"What do you mean you ain't worrying?"

"He's still running," says Bunt. "He ain't a going to die."

"Then I'm crazy," says Pete, thinking he ain't heard him right. "You shot him up, didn't you? We seen it! You hit him all over. He's all tore to pieces! Ain't no man can carry all that lead and live!"

"But he ain't got no lead in him!" says Bunt. "He ain't got nothing in him! All I wanted to do was to tickle him some."

"For the love of—tickle him some! With three loads from a pump gun—"

"Full of salt," Bunt explains simple enough. "Once when I was a kid I seen it worked on a bull. He'll be pretty tender maybe for the next day or two. It takes the fight out of them. I didnt' want to kill nobody, but I made up my mind he was going to let me alone. Maybe I hadn't ought to done it, but when I seen him using Mina that way something come over me. I thought of the gun I'd loaded with salt that way. That bird was getting too fresh—"

Wasn't that a howl, now, I ask you? Bunt never seen what the gang was laughing about.

"It ain't funny," he says. "He might of hurt Mina, and I don't know but what he was trying to pull some rough stuff on me."

"I'll tell the world!" Pete gurgled. "Bunt, you're the goods—"

And then Mina comes out of the dressing tent and interrupts the conversation again.

Somewhere about midnight, Sam, he comes sneaking in. In the morning he was slow-footing around the lot.

"Thought you'd quit?" says Pete sarcastic, seeing him first.

Sam flinched. Maybe it was on account of what Pete said to him, but knowing Sam it was hard to take it that way. He acted more like a kid that's stayed in swimming too long on a sunny day—like he wasn't comfortable standing up in his clothes.

"I change my mind," says Sam. "Maybe you let me go back to work again?"

"You must of changed your mind if you got one now!" Pete was great at flapping a mean tongue.

"I never done nothing—"

"Can that stuff!" says Pete. "Get in the tent. I'll hunt up the spieler and tell him to get ready to make an opening."

It would be nice, now, to tell how Sam was reformed, and Bunt and Mina got along fine all the rest of the season. But it wouldn't be true. Mina was in love with Bunt, the poor fish, all over again, and scared to death of him, too. It sure made Bunt lonesome. Mina had hardly nothing to talk about when she couldn't tell Bunt where he got off at no more. He had a kind of a case when he blames Sam for that.

In less than two weeks Sam was wanting to quit again. One of the boys overheard him talking to Pete:

"I can't stand it," groans Samson, the strong man. "You got to make that Bunt Simpson quit picking on me. He's after me all the time!"

"Crown him!" says Pete.

"He'd kill me," says Sam all hopeless.

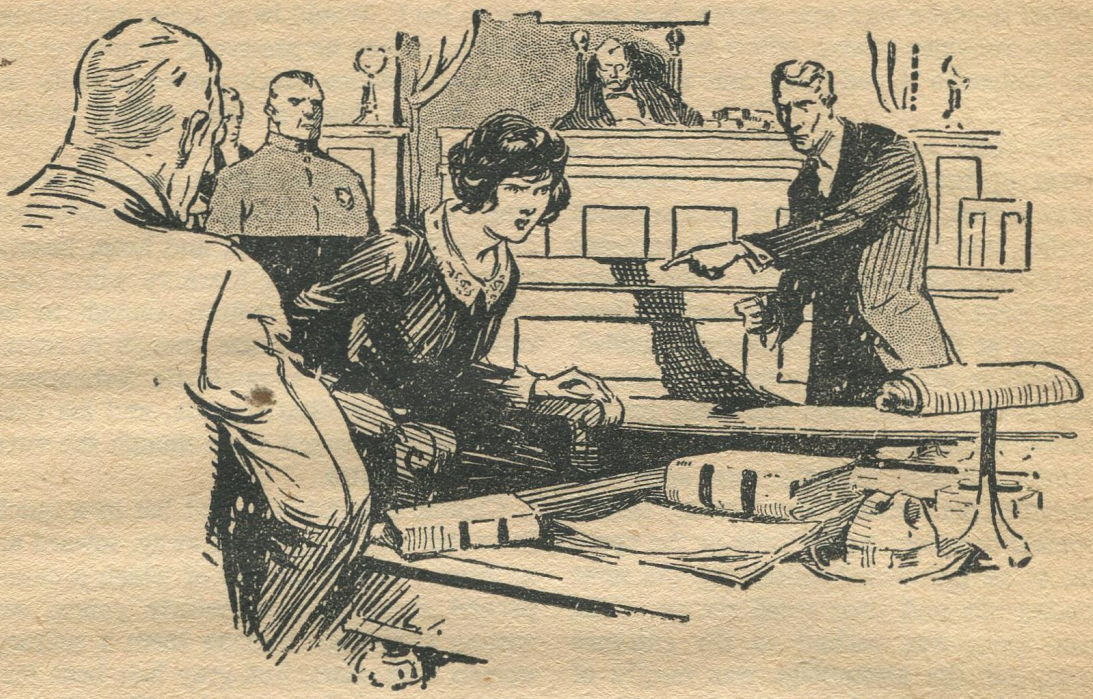
"Well, that would be your funeral. Anyway, I'll bust you one myself if you pull any more stuff about quitting again. Go on over and shove that tank wagon out of the road, and save the trouble of hooking up a team."

Sam shoved it. A little thing like that wasn't nothing to a big gorilla like him. But that just shows. No guy can't have everything. If Sam had been as strong between the ears as he was from the neck down, he might of been a song writer or something. Like he was, he was a ton of cheese.

Sure, all that there caveman stuff is just the bunk in the movies. It goes great in the dark on the screen. But it gets across because they pay out good coin to the bums that are hired to be beat up that way. But outside—

Try it! Pretty soon some softy will lean over and say: "Poor fellow—I wonder how that happened?"

Sam never studied no history. Got it? Fly cops and shotguns! That's where this here civilization comes in.



Dust to Dust

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "McCarty, Incog," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE RACK.

THE anteroom had fallen into silence and the little group of men by the window turned with one accord as the door was thrown open and Claudia entered beside her guard. Her slender figure looked singularly immature and pathetic in the simple black gown with a fold of white crape about her soft throat, and the mass of golden hair was braided like a coronet around the small head.

Dreyer the versatile had seen to the general effect and Mrs. Yates under his tutelage had made no mistake in her second selection. "Don't emphasize style and money, or the mourning," he had advised. "That would be meat for the prosecution. Unsophisticated sincerity—that's our keynote, see? Black, of course, and becoming; bring out all her natural beauty, but make her look like a little girl if you can."

Claudia had submitted without seeming interest, but as before when she stood facing her mirror in all her bridal array that same sense of unreality, of playing a part in some strange drama pervaded her and she moved like an automaton, with no conscious volition of her own. But also, as when she had confronted the grand jury, her mind was keenly alert and apart, watching with dispassionate, critical eyes this Claudia who must arm herself with artlessness, feign love where only loathing existed, preserve a semblance of faith in

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even the memory of the man who had destroyed it—take that one chance in a million to convince twelve fellow beings that her husband's blood was not upon her hands.

The court room beyond buzzed like a swarm of furious bees, then a moment's pause ensued, to be followed by a subdued droning, and still Claudia waited, standing tall and motionless beside her stolid guard. All at once the stout man in uniform bent to listen at the door, straightened, nodded, and with an unconsciously dramatic gesture flung it wide. The time had come for the prisoner's entrance.

Incongruously, Claudia was again reminded of her wedding day, for the second appearance before a multitude as the cynosure of all eyes was heralded by the same rippling stir and then tense silence. The great room was packed to the entrance doors, but the assemblage was mostly of men, although in the rows of spectators bright autumnal hats and gowns with here and there the flash of a jewel revealed the presence of her own sex.

In the front row nearest the counsels' table the first familiar face to catch Claudia's slowly moving gaze was the friendly one of Mrs. Yates, smiling encouragement; midway behind her Mrs. Sears Edgett stared through her lorgnon with avid curiosity undisguised, and at her side Dicky Tewson lounged with a supercilious smile on his thin lips. Far at the rear a dark, little face beneath a hideous erection of flaring red roses nodded vigorously and a thin, clawlike hand waved once in fervid greeting; Rosa Baracca had come back to the scene of her own late ordeal to lend her doubtful support to this other girl, who had been kind to her.

Walking with steady, almost mechanical steps Claudia had reached her chair beside the counsels' table before she realized it. Dreyer bowed with a grave dignity she had never seen in his manner during their previous meetings and Matthew Rowe shook her hand with his most fatherly air, although both had left her only a few minutes before.

At last she raised her eyes to the judge's bench. What was he like, this man who would have the final, momentous words to say to her? Would he be stern, forbidding, ruthless or had he preserved, in spite of the ignoble tragedies which passed in daily review before him, a little warm, kindly, human faith?

She saw a waxen, almost bloodless countenance, the thin cheeks and straight but mobile lips clean-shaven, and keen, inscrutable gray eyes beneath scanty white hair. There was nothing definite enough to be ruthless, nothing animate enough to reveal the possibility of sympathetic forbearance in his aloof, meditative gaze, and his eyes met hers and passed on as though she were a mere spectator.

Claudia's breast rose and fell in a quick little sigh and she glanced away, toward an inclosure, behind the rail of which a close-packed group of men, mostly young, sat writing furiously. Among them a solitary woman with short, iron-gray hair bent forward to catch her eye, but Claudia had dropped hers to the slim hands, ringless save for the narrow circlet of platinum, which lay quietly in her lap.

Her thoughts had gone back to the judge. What dictum would issue from those pale, straight lips when the curtain fell? Would he set her free or pronounce a few irrevocable words which would send her to a living death? Her own lips moved slightly, but no sound came from them, and presently she became aware that some one was barking out a series of names in a short, peremptory voice with monosyllabic responses from a cluster of individuals of widely diversified types whose sole attribute in common appeared to be a cloak of self-consciousness.

With a sense of sudden shock Claudia realized that these were the talesmen from among whom the jury box would be filled; amid this group stood twelve who would hold in their hands the power to clear her name or blacken it forever! She longed to scan their faces, but the consciousness that the eyes of most of them were upon her made her look down once more after that startled, lightning glance. There would be time enough to study them when the twelve alone confronted her.

What was that odd wheel, like a game of chance? Claudia looked quickly at

Uncle Matt, but his benevolently reassuring smile held no enlightenment, and then all at once she was answered, for the wheel spun, a white slip fluttered out, and from it that barking voice read forth a single name.

Claudia's straining ears could not catch it, but its owner evidently did, for a scared-looking little man of indeterminate age stepped forward and nervously requested to be excused. Motioned to the bench beside the judge a brief colloquy ensued and as he was dismissed the girl breathed a little sight of relief. That timid creature would have been a mere weathervane, a nonentity veering with each changing opinion of his colleagues. She felt instinctively that strength was the attribute most to be desired in these men who were to sit in judgment upon her, even if that strength were opposed to her cause; this was to be a fight and weakness had no place here.

"Harvey West."

A tall, rather loose-jointed man in the early fifties, advanced quietly and stood waiting. His drooping mustache and the thin hair receding from a high forehead were tinged with gray, but the sunken, mildly introspective blue eyes held an alert, not unkindly twinkle. Well poised, well, but not ostentatiously groomed, he replied to the questions in a low, modulated tone which carried clearly to where she sat, and Claudia felt rather than perceived an almost imperceptible tensity of interest on the part of her counsel.

Mr. West was not related to nor acquainted with any member of the prosecution, defense or the prisoner herself; he did not look upon sex as a matter of consideration where guilt or innocence was involved and he was not averse to capital punishment. He was an insurance broker, and although not unwilling, he was not particularly anxious to serve; it was a grave responsibility. That observation made his acceptance mutual by both sides and he took his seat in the jury box with a troubled shake of his head.

The foreman! It was this quiet-voiced, sober-faced man who would pronounce the verdict! Claudia wondered dully if he, too, were thinking of this at the moment. Was he asking himself what that verdict would be? He sat quietly, his reflective eyes fastened with detached interest on the clerk of the court—was he avoiding her gaze? She turned to Uncle Matt in time to catch a swift, seemingly congratulatory glance which passed between him and his associate and vaguely reassured, sank back in her chair.

Then followed a long interval while talesman after talesman was called and claimed exemption, and Claudia's attention wandered. Mrs. Yates must have been standing in line for hours in order to get a seat so near—how dear of her! The little pleased glow faded, however, when the girl recalled also the presence of the couple behind her; Mrs. Edgett, she well knew, was there merely to gather material at first hand for the sensational gossip that alone assured her welcome in a certain coterie, and Dicky Tewson had come to gloat. That impecunious scion of a family distinguished chiefly by the propensity of its male members to promote more or less unsavory scandals had been one of her tentative suitors during her débutante year, but Claudia had dismissed him with scant ceremony, and she knew that it had rankled. His small soul must be feeding now upon her degradation—but what did Dicky Tewson matter, or any of the circle which had made up her world?

With a start she realized that a second man was taking the seat beside the foreman in the jury box. A few years younger than his predecessor he was tremendously fat, with the hustling air of a prosperous business man and an almost comic expression of portentous gravity rode upon his broad, good-natured face. He was followed in quick succession by a sallow, attenuated individual answering to the name of Alphonse Chaput, who gesticulated excitedly as he voiced his futile reluctance to leave his hairdressing establishment untended, and by a shrunken, bowed little man whose sharply peering eyes had a look of unutterable wisdom. The latter described himself as Isaac Garfinkel, a pawnbroker, and he settled back in his chair with philosophic calm, listening intently to the prosecution's first challenge.

This was directed against Christopher Sidney, a well-known art dealer in whose innocuous replies Claudia could find no reason for the attitude of the belligerent-mannered assistant district attorney, but a knowing smile flitted across Dreyer's face and in answer to her questioning look he whispered tersely:

"Sells his pictures to your friends, doesn't he? Prosecution won't take a chance on his hurting trade."

Juror number five eventuated in the person of a millionaire whose exploits in the sporting world were so celebrated that a ripple of amusement ran through the spectators when he described himself as a "dog fancier." A baker, stolid and rotund, a flashily garbed stockbroker and a powerful, black-browed, shambling youth who admitted in a rich brogue that he drove a motor truck by profession and preference, were all three accepted before the noon recess, with intervals between when the successful claimants to exemption trickled through one legal crevice or another.

"Going splendidly, Mrs. Hamersley, splendidly!" Dreyer announced when after a luncheon that she could not touch Claudia reappeared with her guard in the anteroom. "The jury box two-thirds full and not a challenge from our side yet! Couldn't get a better lot of men together for our purpose!"

"Look out for the next session, though," Rowe warned. "I recognize a few of the talesmen left and if one or two of them got by our challenge the best we could hope for would be a disagreement."

Claudia listened in bewilderment. So many nationalities, and classes, and varied interests were represented already that the jury box had assumed to her mind the character of a melting pot and somehow she found her interest waning as that dual sense of detachment increased. She saw herself as a mere puppet, the central figure, to be sure, in this grim drama, but only a figure, her fellow actors absorbed in their own parts. Save for perfunctory courtesy Dreyer seemed to have forgotten her existence and even Uncle Matt's tone was absent and preoccupied now when he addressed her, the anxious, hopeless despairing adviser and friend of that dark hour on the previous day lost in the urbane but grimly alert barrister.

"The D. A. slipped in a few of his pet unwashed on this panel, did he?" Dreyer had responded to Rowe's remark with characteristic bluntness. "We'll take care of them. We've put over one or two good things on him ourselves! Number two—Fay, the fat fellow with a chain of shoe stores—happens to be run ragged by private dicks employed by his suspicious wife, and he'll fall with tears of hopeless regret for the angelic faith bestowed by our client on her husband, while number five—Eddie Ankers, the millionaire sport—was crazy about just one girl that anybody has ever been able to discover. She died a couple of years ago and she was the image of Mrs. Hamersley here, although a less refined type. He'll look at her and see an idealized double of his old love, and when we turn on the sob stuff there won't be anything to it as far as he is concerned."

Claudia eyed the dry, cynical little associate counsel in growing wonder. Was he omniscient, that he could know the hidden trials and sorrows of these two out of all that panel and plan coolly to make capital of them?

Matthew Rowe voiced her surprise for her.

"How the devil do you know that?" he demanded, adding: "If we go on at this rate the box will be full by mid-afternoon, and then Kitchell will have his first fling. We may get a line from that on whether or not they've got Zorn and are going to spring him as a star witness. That fellow is a mystery! How he has managed to keep out of their clutches all this time—if he has!—is beyond me, and my men had to give him up as a bad job. I never took any stock in Stephen Munson's notion, of course, but I'm surprised that the boy hasn't reported one way or the other to us before the case opened."

That thought had been in the back of Claudia's mind for several days past and she realized now that it had been Stephen's face for which with unacknowledged hope she had looked among the spectators that morning. He had said with all the fervor

of a vow that he would succeed in his search even if it were at the eleventh hour; but surely the eleventh hour had struck! She had promised her implicit faith and confidence, too, but as the afternoon session opened and she took her place again near the counsels' table she knew that her trust and belief had been in Stephen himself, not in this impossible task he had set his loyal spirit to perform.

She would not allow herself to think of Mrs. Yates's assumption, much less her own unhappy conviction of its truth. Surely they were both mistaken! It would be too dreadful, too undeserved, if poor Stephen had cared for her so hopelessly! The very possibility of it would make a difference in their friendship and the thought brought a blank sense of loss. She had so little now of the only things which made life worth living, whose value she had so tardily discovered! If only Mrs. Yates had not spoken!

But the examination of the talesmen had gone steadily forward and now a stern challenge from Matthew Rowe rang out as an artistically unkempt individual endeavored with ill-assumed reluctance to get into the jury box.

"Emmet Voohees, the lecturer," Dreyer whispered. "Woman hater and rabid against unearned wealth. We'll get this bird, too!"

The "bird" was an unhealthy appearing youth who admitted under unexpected fire that he had recently launched a radical sheet as promptly suppressed by the authorities. Thereafter challenges fell thick and fast from both prosecution and defense, but by mid-afternoon, as Rowe had predicted, the jury was completed.

An astonishingly cadaverous looking college professor with a hawklike, intellectual face and sandy, graying hair seated himself next the burly truck driver, a plump, pompous elderly manufacturer, his smug countenance framed in bushy, white side whiskers, accepted the tenth chair with injured dignity, and the eleventh was filled by a dark, fiery eyed young man who responded to the name of Joe Trapass and announced in naïve pride that he played the first violin in the orchestra of the Alcazar Theater.

The last juror to step into the box was a brisk young salesman with a buoyant, cocksure manner who appeared, unlike the majority of his predecessors, to regard the present experience with something very like elation, and when he had taken his seat an anticipatory sigh like a sudden gust of air which heralds an approaching storm passed through the assembled multitude and died away as a tall, youngish man with prominent, strongly marked features arose leisurely.

Claudia had not observed him before, and now she wondered at it, for he stood waiting in an impressive pause his personality seemed all at once to dominate the great room. In the utter silence Dreyer's lips barely formed the words:

"Kitchell himself; the D. A."

The district attorney! Claudia felt a little chill course through her veins and the hands folded in her lap trembled slightly. Uncle Matt had prepared her, in that last moment before the trial commenced, for a personal attack in the opening address of the prosecution which might seem to her needlessly cruel, but which would be in fact of distinct benefit to her in that it would necessarily reveal the line that the State proposed to take, and Dreyer had chimed in coolly: "That's true, Mrs. Hamersley; it's only part of the game. If the D. A. can get a conviction, especially of a woman, and one of wealth and social prominence like you, it will be an added feather in his cap, but he won't sport any new plumage from this case! He's got a great personality and a commanding stage presence, but he works them both a little too hard; a fine actor, Kitchell, yet he forgets that the critics are only deadheads, after all."

The final observation had been cryptic to Claudia, but as she surveyed the man himself in that tense moment she saw that there was something intensely dramatic about him, not crudely theatric, but suggestive of latent power and force.

Then he began to speak and as his voice, at first low and almost soothing, rose gradually in range and volume his sheer magnetism gripped her and she leaned slowly forward, her lips a little apart and her breath quickening with her heartbeats.

He began with an abstract statement as to the probability of there being in any and every man's life experiences not necessarily discreditable, but which concerned themselves alone or were connected with others who belonged strictly in that phase of existence, and of the inalienable right of any and every man to refuse to divulge the nature of such experiences to any one who might enter that existence at a later phase, no matter in how sacred a relationship.

Claudia's eyelids fluttered at the thinly veiled allusion, but the direct utterance of her husband's name made them open wide once more.

The district attorney was speaking of the dead man in seeming eulogy, his value to the community as a reputable citizen, his sterling worth as attested to by the business associates with whom he had affiliated himself in the brief period he had been in the city, the hosts of friends among men of long standing, social and financial prominence, whom he had made during the two short years since he had appeared in New York.

Two short years! That was his keynote, and with consummate skill he gradually etched into his word picture, while still apparently praising the subject of it, a suggestion of mystery which grew more and more sinister, emphasizing the veil which hung over the past of this paragon of manly rectitude and implying that veil, if swept aside, might reveal a secret he had guarded with his life—and given his life to guard. What the nature of that secret might be, and whether he had kept it through choice or compulsion, the district attorney would leave for the gentlemen of the jury to conjecture with all fair mindedness toward the man who could not defend himself because his lips had been foully, maliciously closed in death, by one who a few hours before had vowed to love, honor, and obey him.

And then it came! The storm which Claudia had been dreading broke with pitiless force upon her head, but she did not bow before it. A little more white, she leaned back slowly in her chair, her eyes gazing straight before her and only the tensely clasped hands revealing her mental agony.

She was painted as proud, arrogant, selfish and of violent temper, spoiled from birth and believing that the world was her plaything. Although the district attorney launched no direct diatribe against the class from which she sprang he let it be inferred that in her insolent disregard of the rights of others and lack of self-government she was a typical daughter of the idle rich, and as he had played up the suggestion of mystery in the dead man's past, so now pride was the theme upon which he harped.

Claudia felt that no longer was she a mere figure about which the action of this drama revolved; the body of her might be there in that chair, but her heart, her soul was stretched upon a rack, disjointed, tortured, broken. Her hands clutched each other so tightly that the ring cut deep into her flesh and a little pulse beat visibly in her throat, but still she sat motionless, an infinity of pain in her eyes.

The district attorney had started now upon a résumé of the case itself, describing the scene before the church and calling upon the married men among the gentlemen of the jury to judge whether any wife would believe such a paltry, easily disproved lie as the excuse which the prisoner would allege that she blindly accepted. He then pictured the return of Niles Hamersley, the quarrel which the State would show to have taken place and the resultant reconstructed tragedy so very closely along the lines which the blackmailer Zorn had described in the accusation he hurled at her that Claudia's blood turned to water in her veins.

"Look at the prisoner before you, gentlemen of the jury!" he thundered, turning suddenly to face her. "Can you see her watching the body of the man whose name she bears and whom she had just foully murdered, sink all at once through the decayed flooring which the jar of his fall had shattered?

"Can you see her creeping forward with the light of unholy inspiration in her eyes to gaze down upon her handiwork and cast the still smoking revolver close to that inanimate clay, that broken thing which but a moment before had been a man—the man who in all love and trusting faith had taken her for his wife? The State will show you

these things; the State will show you that this woman sitting here in insolent unconcern, considering herself above the law and its just decree, is a cold-blooded, calculating murderess and you will be asked to render a verdict on the evidence set before you!"

The towering, dominant figure blurred and waved before her eyes and Claudia did not know when that forceful, insidiously compelling voice ceased and court was adjourned. Blindly she rose when the guard touched her arm and moved amid black, menacing shadows from the room and across the Bridge of Sighs to her cell.

The kindhearted matron petted and ministered to her, but she was unaware even of the woman's presence, her flesh deadened and insensate and her spirit writhing.

But the guard appeared once more, summoning her to the counsel room and again she followed blindly. But on the threshold she paused, her heart suddenly pounding and the blood rushing warmly to her very brow. Matthew Rowe was there and Quincey Dreyer, but a third man stood where the waning light of late afternoon fell full upon his face and Claudia held out her hands with a little choking cry.

"Stephen!"

"I have kept my promise to you, Claudia. It is almost too late, but, thank God, I am still in time! I have found Hugo Zorn!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

STEPHEN'S voice fell upon Claudia's ear like a message uttered in a dream, so often had she heard it in the dark watches of dreary, interminable nights and she tottered and would have fallen had not he sprung forward and caught her in his arms. For a moment she clung to him trembling, the surging beat of his heart against hers vibrating through all her frame, seeming to endow her with new strength. Then she gently withdrew herself from his protective embrace and let him lead her to a chair.

Matthew Rowe cleared his throat, but his tones were still husky when he spoke.

"This is wonderful news, my dear! Dreyer and I found Stephen waiting at my office, and although I knew how nearly prostrated you must be I felt that you must hear his story without delay. He has learned the whole truth, the details of the affair in your husband's past that Zorn was holding over his head and notwithstanding the fact that it is bound to revolt and hurt you—"

"Do you think that anything can ever hurt me again, Uncle Matt?" Claudia interrupted. "Don't you suppose that I am impervious to all suffering after the revelations of the last twenty-four hours and that experience in court to-day? Whatever it is in Niles's past, however revolting, it is far better that I know it in every detail than imagine the fearful things which have thronged my brain since that man appeared, leering from the end of the pew as I came down the church aisle!"

"I told you!" Dreyer nodded quickly. "The knowledge of her husband's real character may be a shock to Mrs. Hamersley, but she is right; it is best that she know the truth.

"Munson, don't bother now with how you discovered Zorn: get down to cases and tell her just what you told us as nearly in the fellow's own words as you can remember, from the minute you confronted him this afternoon in that flat on the Concourse."

Stephen regarded Claudia with troubled eyes.

"I don't like to be the one to bring an added blow to you after all you have endured to-day nor to speak disparagingly of the dead as I must, but I'm not going to think of myself now. I know from Mr. Rowe what you told Inspector Dawes about Niles Hamersley's early history which he had let fall to you from time to time, but you said later to Mr. Rowe that you thought he had not inherited all his money, but made it in stock speculations in some Western city. Did I understand that correctly?"

"Yes, Stephen." She nodded. "I didn't tell the inspector because, looking back, I could see that Niles's manner had been odd and constrained after that single occasion

when he spoke of those operations, as though he were sorry he had mentioned that period in his life to me, and when I found that there was something hanging over him it occurred to me that it must belong to those years which he did not care to discuss. You don't mean that his money was made in illegal ways—that he was a criminal?"

"Criminal negligence is all that the law could have held him responsible for, yet there was murder on his soul, Claudia!" Stephen's voice was low but firm, and although he spoke with an obvious effort he went doggedly on: "The foundation of the fortune he was making was the indirect cause of the action which he took and which resulted in the death of one innocent person and the unjust punishment of another. I'll cut this part of the story as short as I can and then give you Zorn's version of how he came to be involved in the matter."

"He told me that he had once done a great favor for my husband and run a personal risk in doing so," Claudia observed.

"He magnifies the risk, but he did help Niles's Hamersley out of a—a nasty hole. They were clerks together in the St. Louis branch office of a stock brokerage concern with headquarters in Chicago some twelve years ago, making twenty dollars a week and commissions, and neither of them had another penny. Hamersley was prepossessing, though; Zorn was not. He lived in a cheap commercial hotel and played the races on the quiet; Hamersley had a cubbyhole of a room in an extremely proper boarding house in the outskirts of the best residential section of the city and played society. His name wasn't Hamersley then, Claudia; it was Jim Raikes, and he changed it legally afterward, as Zorn ascertained, but he was really a native of Canada, as he told you."

"The son of an English valet who migrated there with his master and married the daughter of a sheep farmer," Dreyer's cool voice broke in. "Our client wants all the truth, Munson."

"Tell me!" Claudia begged. "I agree with Mr. Dreyer, Stephen; I must know everything! You say that Niles's played society. Do you mean women? Zorn said that he was always a wizard with them, that he hypnotized them, but I never gave it a second thought."

"He was a—great success with them," Stephen said slowly, "especially the rich, elderly ones. Please try to remember that I am only repeating Zorn's story. Hamersley handled all the women's accounts at the brokerage house and his commissions more than doubled Zorn's. He laid himself out to be agreeable and the women—widows for the most part, with more money than they knew what to do with—took to inviting him to their houses. He had a flair, a natural genius for social organization and soon he was planning their entertainments, originating novel parties and that sort of thing, until no affair in a certain clique was complete without him. The leader of their set was the widow of a millionaire brewer, so old that she was becoming a trifle eccentric. Hamersley made himself indispensable to her. He was only in the late twenties, you know, and she took a tremendous fancy to him, being quite alone in the world. Before long she was lending him large sums to speculate with on the market on his own account. He severed his connection with the brokerage house, but still kept up his acquaintance with Zorn, who claims he gave him valuable tips.

"The old lady had promised to remember Hamersley substantially in her will, but she put it off and the matter was hanging fire when he met a girl who upset all his calculations. She was a decent enough little thing, according to Zorn, and worked in the confectioner's shop where Hamersley bought candy for his elderly benefactress. She was engaged to a young plumber who owned a fast second-hand runabout. I mention this because that car figures in the catastrophe which happened later.

"Minnie—that was the girl's name—fell head over heels in love with Hamersley when he began amusing himself by flirting with her. He took her about on the quiet, showing her the sort of life she'd never known before; late parties at roadhouses and that sort of thing—nothing wrong, but it would have broken off her affair with the young chap who was saving up to marry her and killed Hamersley's chances of an in-

heritance from the jealous old lady if it had become known.

"He tried to break away after a while, but the girl couldn't understand and kept running after him until he was mortally afraid it would come to the old lady's ears. He kept in touch with Zorn and told him all his difficulties. One night the girl borrowed her sweetheart's car and waylaid Hamersley as he was leaving his benefactress's house after a big dinner party.

"Minnie was heartbroken and hysterical and in fear that she would make a scene which some of the other departing guests might witness he got in and drove for a little way out into the country with her.

"Zorn professes not to know how it actually happened, but it is inconceivable that Hamersley deliberately wrecked the car. Anyway, it was found next morning demolished in a ditch on the outskirts of the city, with the girl dead beside it. There were houses near, although not near enough for their occupants to have heard the crash, and most of them had telephones. An ambulance could have reached the spot from a city hospital in plenty of time to save her life, as the autopsy proved, but the girl died without aid, alone."

"How—terrible!" Claudia shuddered. "What a fiend—a cowardly, despicable wretch he was! I cannot believe it, and yet—I once saw an expression on his face—I suppose that even a life could not stand in the way of his ambition!"

"That was it, Claudia," Stephen agreed gently. "Now for Zorn's part in it, and you must believe as much or as little of his account as you please. It was midnight or a little after in late summer, and too hot to sleep. He was tossing about half-clad on his bed in the shabby little hotel room when Hamersley slipped in, white and shaking and covered with dust and blood.

"He told Zorn of the meeting and the drive out into the country, of telling Minnie that he was through and wouldn't see her again and the scene that ensued. He admitted he was driving and going faster and faster in his anger and disgust with the whole affair and suddenly the girl, beside herself, seized the wheel, sending the car into the ditch. He said he was thrown clear and stunned, but not hurt except for the gash in his shoulder, but when he regained consciousness the girl was dead.

"Zorn swears he believed him then, but there was no mark on Hamersley's head as though he had been stunned, and the autopsy revealed that the girl had lived for at least an hour after the accident, too weak to call for help.

"He said that when he saw there was nothing to be done for Minnie he began to think of the old woman and the fortune that night's work would cost him if it were known, and so he had come to Zorn for an alibi, sneaking into the hotel past the sleeping porter. He took off the rags of his dinner clothes, and Zorn bathed and bandaged his shoulder, getting him into pyjamas. Then they rang for the porter to bring ice water, complaining that they'd been ringing for an hour, that Zorn had had a nose bleed, and pointing to the soiled towels for verification. They made a few other remarks to convince the man that they'd been in the room together since early evening, immediately after Hamersley had left the old lady's dinner party, in the event that any one might have seen him with the girl.

"No one had, though. Zorn lent him a suit in the morning and the following night buried the torn, blood-stained dinner clothes in one of the parks while Hamersley was in Chicago, where he had gone to duplicate them in a hurry. The car was traced, of course, the girl's fiancé was arrested and served a term in the penitentiary. When he came out he disappeared, and Zorn swears he kept silence through friendship for Hamersley. That was the risk he ran. The young man couldn't prove where he had spent the evening, you see, and the circumstantial evidence was damning.

"The old lady died subsequently without changing her will to leave anything to Hamersley, but he'd—er—borrowed enough from her by that time to lay the foundations of his fortune. His success on the market in Chicago was phenomenal. Zorn says he lost track of him after he left St. Louis, which may or may not be true. He himself had fallen on hard times and he recognized a picture of Hamersley published

in a New York paper that he picked up in Milwaukee a few days before—before the wedding.

"The change of name puzzled him, but he was certain of his identity and came to get his old friend to help him, as he puts it. He had enough money to make a presentable appearance in the church and managed to get an usher to admit him without a card. Hamersley thought he was dead, it seems, and although Zorn swears he was not responsible for such a rumor reaching him, I fancy it was all part of a well-laid scheme.

"He declares that about three months ago he ran into the young man who had disappeared. He'd been digging up evidence against Hamersley and was determined to get him if the law didn't, but he was looking for 'Jim Raikes,' you see. He doesn't know now that they were one and the same, nor that the man who let his sweetheart die is dead himself, but Zorn asserts that he is here in the East now, and he can produce him at a few hours' notice. Whether that is a bluff or not, he evidently held it over Hamersley's head, and now he wants twenty-five thousand dollars, Claudia, before nine to-morrow morning or he'll come down and give himself up as a material witness for the State. Mr. Rowe and his associate say his story—"

Stephen paused suggestively and Dreyer exclaimed:

"It would send you up, Mrs. Hamersley, without the jury leaving the box!"

"It isn't as though you were guilty, Claudia!" Matthew Rowe supplemented. "You are innocent and we cannot afford to let the prosecution get hold of this evidence to further injure your case."

"To do so might bring about a miscarriage of justice, Claudia," Stephen said in a choked voice. "That scoundrel will never carry out his threat! If you won't consent to the payment of this money I swear that when I meet him in the morning to keep my appointment I'll silence him forever!"

"Stephen! No! Never that!" Claudia cried. "There has been enough hideous tragedy connected with this case and there shall be no blood on your hands because of me! Give him the money, Uncle Matt! You can arrange for such a sum in time?"

"I have had it ready, waiting!" Rowe returned grimly. "Stephen will send me a message when he has concluded the business, and I'll see that it reaches us in court. Now try to rest, my dear; your ordeal has just begun, but thank God, our way is clear before us at last!"

No sleep came to Claudia that night, however. Her own agony over the district attorney's scathing attack upon her was forgotten in that pitiful, needless tragedy of the past, and until the dawn the specter of the injured girl, dying helpless and alone because of Niles Hamersley's cowardice, was ever before her eyes.

What a vile creature had been this man whom she had married! Beneath his suave, smiling exterior what depths of depravity and calculating cruelty had lain concealed! Duping a senile old woman and cajoling her into lending him huge sums of money to further his own interests, breaking a girl's heart to amuse himself, standing by while the man who had really loved her went to prison for his own criminal, craven fault!

After disillusionment cured her of her blind infatuation she had shuddered with horror at the thought of his love, but had he really cared for her? Was such a black heart as his capable of real affection? The idea was too awful to contemplate now that she knew his true character. But he was dead! It was over!

Still her unhappy mind returned to that last scene between them. How grimly he had warned her of the Bluebeard's Chamber into which she must not pry, and then hurriedly assured her that there had never been another woman than herself in his life! Could he have uttered those words without the vision rising before him then, as she saw it now, of the broken body gasping out its last in the ditch beside the wrecked car?

In the world without there had been no rain for many days. With the coming of morning a wind rose, gaining steadily in volume until it was blowing a gale by the time court opened. Claudia heard it moaning and swirling in violent gusts as she crossed the Bridge of Sighs to the renewal of her ordeal and the ominous promise of coming storm accorded with the dull forebod-

ing which had settled over her spirit. A sense of something dire impending filled her thoughts when she entered the court room, and she wondered how Stephen had fared on his mission. Could Uncle Matt have heard from him yet?

As on the previous day her eyes swept the spectators in a quick, comprehensive glance, glowing softly as they noted Mrs. Yates's faithful presence. Then they fell upon Dicky Tewson sitting alone and a little frown gathered between her eyes. Did he mean to attend the trial to its end, hoping to see her convicted? How much deeper his vindictive resentment at her dismissal must have gone than she imagined?

Her attorneys bowed gravely as she seated herself and turned slightly to Rowe.

"Stephen—" Her lips barely moved.

Matthew Rowe shook his head in silence, and in a few moments he was on his feet, addressing the jury in his turn.

He desired first of all to congratulate his learned friend the district attorney on the remarkable case he had made out on the previous day, the only trouble with it being that it wasn't fact. The gentlemen of the jury had been requested to be "fair-minded" in their judgment of the late Niles Hamersley, as though a doubt existed that they would be fair-minded in whatever judgment they might be called upon to make, but he, Matthew Rowe, questioned the "fair-mindedness" of the implication that any secret existed in the past of the late husband of his client merely because he had not been a resident of New York prior to two years ago.

The bereaved young widow seated before them in a grief too deep for tears had devoted her life to charity and good works since the death of her father, she had had no worldly experience, and when she fell in love for the first time she loved deeply and truly, with utter faith and trust. It was her consolation now that that trust had not been misplaced, that that faith had been justified! She had sent her husband from her at the very doors of the church to succor his dying friend, and on his return had greeted him with all tenderness and love. Not the shadow of a cloud had rested between them, as would be proved to the satisfaction of the gentlemen of the jury, until they had found that old revolver in the attic with which the late Mr. Hamersley was amusing himself when the floor suddenly gave way, precipitating him to his death.

Claudia listened to the benign, fatherly tones as Uncle Matt went on to describe in detail the tragedy as she had herself been called upon to tell it so many times, but her thoughts were far away. Time was passing; why had no word come from Stephen? Surely something must have gone wrong! The wind was howling outside the court room windows and the sky was heavily overcast, but still there was no rain, and a grim, portentous waiting had seemed to settle down brooding over the face of the universe.

But Uncle Matt had reached his peroration.

"Look at the young girl before you, gentlemen of the jury!" His gentle, pitying voice was in telling contrast to the thunderous tones of his opponent on the previous day. "She is utterly alone, the man to whom but a few short hours before she had given the sole right to protect her has been taken from her by the most cruel of chances, snatched from before her very eyes in a moment of joyous happiness by an accident at once simple to comprehend and fearful to contemplate! Does she appear to be the cold-blooded, calculating murderess our learned friend would have you believe?

"She asks neither sympathy nor pity; her sorrow is too profound for human consolation. She asks only that she be judged by the true facts in this case as they shall be set before you, not suppositions as fallacious as they are fanciful. Counsel for the defense will offer you evidence, not theories, and will ask that you set this young girl free or send her to join her husband, according to your decision."

A gasp ran through the court room at this bold stroke, and as Matthew Rowe seated himself a murmur of something very like applause rose and swelled until checked by the sharp rap of the gavel. Claudia looked at him with all her heart in her eyes and smiled waveringly in wordless gratitude, but already the district attorney was on his

feet seeking to wipe out the impression which his adversary had obviously made by proceeding at once with the case.

Dr. Jeffreys, the medical examiner, was the first witness. He was subjected to a lengthy cross-examination by Rowe when turned over to the defense. The questions concerned the wound made by the revolver shot and the condition and nature of the injuries inflicted upon the body of Niles Hamersley by the fall from the attic into the room below, but it brought out nothing new, and to Claudia's mind was so evidently a mere effort to gain time that her anxiety and suspense increased.

Still no message came, and when the doctor was succeeded on the witness stand by Inspector Dawes and the testimony given at the time of the indictment was repeated the girl's vague foreboding became a mounting dread.

Had Stephen quarreled with the blackmailer and carried out his threat to silence him forever? Shivering, she recalled the grim earnestness in his tone when he swore to do so if she would not consent to the sordid bargain. How could Uncle Matt remain so seemingly intent on the inspector's evidence, every word of which he must know by heart, and how could Dreyer sit there with that cynically humorous expression, his gaze fixed upon his ancient enemy, the district attorney, as though the personal feud between them was the only thing that mattered! Could anything have happened to Stephen himself?

The noon recess came and after hastily swallowing a few mouthfuls of food Claudia hurried back with her guard to the anteroom, where she found her joint counsel awaiting her. Here there was no pretense.

"Not a word, child!" Rowe replied to her tremulous query. "We can only wait and hope—"

"We could have put the negotiations in competent hands!" Dreyer gestured nervously. "This is what comes of sending a boy on a man's errand!"

"It was the boy who succeeded where every one else failed," Claudia reminded him quietly. "I have perfect confidence in Stephen himself, but I am afraid—I feel that something dreadful has happened! I suppose we can only wait on, as Uncle Matt says, but the suspense is almost unendurable!"

It was ended sooner than she had dreamed, however, and in a fashion which her worst foreboding had not pictured. The afternoon session was opened, and when the clerk of the court turned to call the third witness for the prosecution the district attorney arose with such an air of anticipatory triumph that Claudia straightened instinctively in her chair and in a low aside she heard Dreyer's warning:

"Look out! He's going to unmask his guns!"

"Hugo Zorn to the stand!" In the tense stillness the clerk's voice rang out wtih almost startling distinctness, and the girl's heart turned to lead within her. Zorn! The authorities had located him at the eleventh hour and she was lost! Or had he deliberately offered himself to the State as a witness after obtaining the money for his silence from Stephen? But why had no message come? Where was Stephen?

Her counsel sat stunned, but with the frantic questions flooding her brain Claudia did not notice the long pause that had ensued until the clerk of the court once more called that hated name.

Then a door at the side of the court room opened and an attendant entered hurriedly to proceed to the district attorney. A quick, low-toned interchange of question and answer followed and the prosecutor turned to face both the court and the jury box. His expression was for once wholly sincere in his shocked amazement and when he spoke his voice was low and trembled.

"May it please the court, I must withdraw the name of this witness. Hugo Zorn can never take the stand to testify. I have just received word of his death!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NEW WITNESS.

COURT was hurriedly adjourned, and Claudia returned to her cell to wait with what patience she could muster for the summons to the counsel room to confer with Uncle Matt and his associate.

She was aghast and all but stupefied by the effect of shock following upon shock in those few tense minutes and her brain reeled, yet one thought hammered there with awful insistence. Stephen!

Had he done this terrible thing, and for her sake? She had once felt that the world would be well rid of Zorn, but not at this fearful price! Not if it should bring Stephen to suffer what she was enduring now, not if it meant his liberty, perhaps his life!

When at length the guard came for her she found Uncle Matt alone in the counsel room.

"What have you discovered?" Claudia clutched his arm with slender, ice cold fingers. "Tell me, Uncle Matt! Did—did Stephen—"

"We don't know anything yet," Rowe replied in a nervously hurried undertone. "Zorn's body has been found in the river and identified; we don't know by whom. Dreyer has—ways of getting information around here, and he's gone to discover what he can. Don't look like that, child! Stephen—the body may have been in the water all night!"

The rain had come at last. Claudia listened to it for a moment as it swirled against the window, and then shook her head slowly.

"You don't think so, Uncle Matt! Heavens, why doesn't some word come? You remember what Stephen swore last night—" She paused as the door opened and Quincey Dreyer entered.

His face was a study and with one of his clumsy, peremptory gestures he motioned them over to the window, as far as possible from the guard.

"You know where that new stone bridge has recently been completed across the river connecting with one of the main motor roads through the suburbs and up into the State?" he demanded. "It is close beside the remains of the old one, in fact, the street on this side practically connects with them both."

"I know!" Rowe nodded quickly. "I've been over the old one a hundred times! I thought it had been dismantled and the entrances safeguarded on both sides of the river! You don't mean to say it was there that Zorn was found?"

"From what I have been able to gather. Only the piles of the bridge remain, but the entrance on this side at least has been left intact still and instead of a permanent wall only a temporary blockade was erected, which the windstorm this morning carried away." He paused, glancing out between the bars at the driving rain and then continued in a still lower tone: "It seems inconceivable, but apparently Zorn became confused in some way and walked off the edge of that old bridge, mistaking it for the new. Unless he was suddenly stricken blind I don't see how it could be possible!"

"Were there any—marks on his body?" Rowe asked with a significant pause between his words.

"Only bruises from knocking against the piles, I understand. It's the damnedest—your pardon, Mrs. Hamersley!—the strangest thing I ever heard of!"

"It was an accident, they are sure of that?" Her breath came in convulsive gasps. "Oh, thank heaven!"

"There is no suggestion of foul play that I've learned. The body will be taken to the morgue for the autopsy and that will determine the cause of death. Piece of sheer luck for us, wasn't it?"

Claudia shuddered.

"Why have we heard nothing from Stephen?" Her voice was a mere whisper. "Was anything said about what might have been found on the—the body? Money, I mean?"

Before he could answer the door opened once more and a male guard beckoned to Matthew Rowe. As the latter hurried across the room the eyes of both followed him and they saw the expression of glad relief which came over his face at the attendant's whisper.

"Of course!" he nodded vigorously. "Bring him right in."

"It's Stephen!" Claudia cried. "Now we shall know!"

"Yes, thank the Lord!" A smile had lifted the wearily drooping corners of the attorney's lips. "I wonder where the boy has been, though!"

That question was replied to by Stephen

himself when he entered a moment later, drenched and a little white, but with as buoyant a step as ever.

"You've heard, Claudia? I was waiting in your office, Mr. Rowe, when I heard that court had been adjourned at the start of the afternoon session and I knew that something unexpected must have occurred. I didn't think it wise to come here or send a message before—"

"Now that you're here, Munson, tell us what you know," Dreyer interrupted tersely. "Zorn was called as a witness for the prosecution at the opening of court this afternoon and then the announcement was made of his death. Do you know when it occurred—and how?"

Stephen nodded very gravely.

"I was waiting on the other side of the river for him," he said. "He must have been coming to keep his appointment, but the dust storm blinded him and he walked off the edge—"

"Dust!" A creeping sense of awe stole over Claudia. Was it mere accident, after all, by which this man had come to his death at the moment when he was about to do her the greatest injury? Had some strangely beneficent fate, watching over her, removed him, as it had that other, from her path?

"Yes. You must have heard the wind! It was most unprecedented at this time of year, but so was the long drought we've had." Stephen hung his dripping hat on the back of his chair and removed his sodden overcoat before seating himself. "Is that all you've heard about Zorn? He didn't want me to come again to that apartment on the Concourse where he had a room and it suited me because—well, you know what I had in mind if I couldn't come to terms with him! When I think of it, and then of what happened anyway—well, it kind of gives a fellow a queer feeling!"

"I know!" Claudia murmured very low. "Oh, Stephen, I was so afraid—"

"He tried to double-cross us, anyway!" Stephen's jaw set. "You've been told where the body was found? You know the locality?"

He had turned to the attorneys and Dreyer nodded.

"There are vacant lots and rocks and patches of woodland on the far side where the new road branches off from the old," he remarked. "I don't remember any house for a quarter of a mile or more."

"That's why I chose it," explained Stephen. "I was to meet him there at half past eight. I reached the spot over the new bridge in plenty of time, but he didn't appear. The wind was howling a perfect gale and driving clouds of dust like solid walls before it; you couldn't see your hand before your face when the gusts arose and it was almost impossible to breathe! There are several new buildings going up on the city side of the river, you know, with heaps of loose sand lying around, and Zorn must have been caught in a miniature desert storm. The barricade at the end of the bridge abutment had been blown away and believing that he was crossing the new span he must have simply stepped off into space! Lord, what an end!"

"Was he drowned?" Claudia whispered fearfully. "I thought bodies usually sank at first! How was he found?"

"The ambulance doctor called it heart disease; I heard him," Stephen replied. "I waited there on the other side of the river for more than three hours walking up and down and sheltering myself behind the rocks as well as I could when a blast of wind came. It settled down to a steady blow as the sky grew darker, and I was wild, wondering if Zorn had been located at the last minute by the authorities or what had happened to him!

"Then at last I saw a commotion at the other side of the bridge and a crowd beginning to collect at the abutment of the old one and somehow—I knew! You know what I was carrying? I hid it under a big stone in the lot and hurried across the bridge. Before I reached the other side I heard an ambulance gong, and when I pushed my way into the crowd they had just hauled Zorn up from the water.

"A workman standing near was explaining how he happened to see the body as he started to clear away the débris of the old barricade, and I waited only long enough to hear the doctor's diagnosis, then went back over the bridge, got the wallet from where

I'd hidden it and hurried as quickly as the nearest subway would take me to Zorn's apartment."

"Why?" demanded Rowe. "What were you going to do there and why on earth didn't you get a message to me first?"

"I hadn't time. I was afraid Zorn might be identified by some papers found on him and I wanted to get there before the police did. The landlady knew I'd had a long talk with him yesterday and I had an idea she would let me into his room, presumably to wait for him. I was thinking of possible evidence connected with Hamersley which Zorn might have been holding to try to sell later.

"The woman was out, but another lodger admitted me; an excitable old fellow, and the first words he spoke were to ask whether I came from the police! It seems when he was going down town last night Zorn gave him a letter with a special delivery stamp, and was so particular about its being mailed only at the end of the trip that the old chap took a look at the address. It was police headquarters, and he's been all agog ever since. I got away as fast as I could then, of course, but it's easy to see that out of sheer malice or personal enmity against you, Claudia, that scoundrel offered to appear in court this afternoon as the State's witness to tell what he knew of Hamersley after getting your twenty-five thousand. We could have proved nothing, and he must have had a safe place arranged to stow that money away for months to come!"

"It shows, though, that he had no letters nor other evidence against Hamersley to hold over our heads," Rowe observed. "He'd shot his bolt and knew it. I very much doubt his story that the dead girl's fiancé has turned up again. You are free from Zorn at last, my dear! We have an even chance now to win and, please God, we will!"

"On a—a lie, though!" Claudia clasped her hands. "If only somehow the real truth could be known! To think that that old revolver of father's should have been the cause of all this tragedy now! Do you remember that time we took it to play with years ago, Stephen? We little thought then what the future was to bring—"

"Claudia!" Stephen sprang from his chair. "It is the same revolver? You are sure of it?"

"Why, of course—" she began, wonderingly, but he had already turned to the attorneys.

"It's the prosecution's star exhibit, isn't it?"

"Yes." Dreyer was eying him keenly. "They will probably put it in evidence the first thing to-morrow. The jury is being shown over the scene of the accident this afternoon. What's on your mind?"

"You can arrange to see that revolver now, though, can't you? I only want a glimpse of it, not to touch it!" Stephen was growing more and more excited, and Rowe interposed:

"It is possible, but what is the use, my boy? We know, unfortunately, that it fired that fatal shot—"

"Never mind! We've got to work fast!" Stephen turned to Claudia once more and seized both her hands. "Perhaps we won't win on a lie, after all! There'll be a new witness to-morrow—for the defense!"

In her cell Claudia paced restlessly the few steps its narrow space permitted until long after darkness fell. She could not imagine what sudden inspiration had come to Stephen nor who the witness of whom he had spoken might be, but just as that haunting foreboding had possessed her throughout the morning so now faith and an abiding hope glowed within her like a steady flame. Stephen had not failed her, and he would not fail now, but a force, greater, irresistible, held her in its power, and Stephen, too!

The wretched Zorn had been a mere atom in its grasp and so had Niles Hamersley, their puny potentiality for evil given a little sway and then crushed! That same force was at work now at this moment—it had sent to Stephen's mind an impulse beyond her divination there in the counsel room and to-morrow its will should be made manifest!

The morning brought no cessation of the rain which beat down in a steady torrent upon the world outside and a humid, acrid odor as of steam permeated the court room as Claudia entered and took her place once

more. Her glance sweeping the spectators discovered Mrs. Yates, damp but determinedly cheerful, and in the row just behind her Dicky Tewson caught her eye. He nodded deliberately with an enigmatic smile and a tiny glow of annoyance mounted in her wan cheeks as with no sign of recognition she looked above and beyond him. Her search was unsuccessful; Stephen was not there.

Dreyer appeared as nonchalant as ever as he greeted her, and Rowe as calmly paternal, but Claudia detected beneath his urbanity a shade of self-consciousness as though he were endeavoring to veil from her some inner emotion. A little thrill of excitement ran through her. Was he going to produce Stephen's witness when the moment came?

The ascetic, inscrutable face of the judge looked down from behind his high desk, but somehow the bloodless, waxen countenance seemed a shade more animate, and in the meditative gaze a gentleness brooded. Was it only because hope filled her heart that he appeared more human and kindly?

She had avoided the eyes of the jurymen on the previous day, not in fear or confusion, but in a proud aversion to the thought that some one of them might misread appeal in her glance. Now she regarded them each in turn with a calmly impersonal gaze.

The foreman seemed lost in reflection, but his immediate neighbor eyed the district attorney expectantly, his broad, good-natured face still weighed down with that expression of portentous gravity. This was the man with the suspicious wife, Claudia remembered; had the prosecutor's cynically sarcastic allusion to the blind belief of "any wife" already prejudiced him? Number three, the excitable Frenchman appeared to be on ill terms with Garfinkel, who sat beside him, for he was shrugging expressively and eying the little pawnbroker with exaggerated contempt; but the latter was smiling quietly to himself as though he had gotten the better of some argument.

Again that impression of vast wisdom came to the girl as though his self-containment emanated from a profound knowledge of human nature, and with added confidence her gaze traveled to the next man, to find his fixed full upon her in a wistful, absent stare which seemed incongruously pathetic, coming from this man whose healthily tanned, perfectly groomed countenance seemed otherwise to radiate complete satisfaction with life. But this was the man who had been "crazy about just one girl," the girl who had looked like her and who was dead!

Hastily, as if she had surprised him into a confidence, Claudia's eyes turned to number six, but the stolid baker, too, was regarding her, though with a lively, personal curiosity, and her glance traveled swiftly along the second row. Broker and truck driver, professor and manufacturer, musician and salesman, all six had fastened their gaze upon her with varying degrees of interest as though her scrutiny had drawn theirs and her glance fell.

At that moment the clerk of the court turned.

"Risdon Lamont."

Claudia started. Why, he was Niles's friend, and had been an usher at her wedding! What could this middle-aged, rather pompous clubman have to impart?

Whatever it was, he seemed highly reluctant to reveal it, for his face flushed painfully as he took the stand, and he mumbled his oath with obvious embarrassment.

"Mr. Lamont, you were present at the marriage of Niles Hamersley and Claudia Langham, the prisoner before you?" the district attorney asked.

Mr. Lamont contented himself with a bow of assent and the prosecutor continued.

"In what capacity?"

"I was an usher."

"Do you recall any guest or guests who sought admission without a card?"

He meant Zorn! Claudia glanced at her attorneys, but Dreyer had assumed an air of utter boredom, and Uncle Matt was lost in a reverie which seemed to be affording him much inward satisfaction.

"I recall one, a man." The witness coughed nervously.

"Do you recall him distinctly?"

"I do."

"Mr. Lamont, will you please describe this guest to the gentlemen of the jury?"

"He was short and slight, rather Slavic in type and very dark." The witness appeared to be searching his mind in an effort to express himself. "He insisted that he was an intimate, old friend of Mr. Hamersley, and had come from the West solely to attend the wedding, only to find at the last moment that he had mislaid his card. I led him to one of the rear pews. Had he not been correctly attired for the occasion I would not have admitted him, for he was—well, not of Mr. Hamersley's class—not—not a gentleman, really!"

A smothered but belligerent ejaculation came from the eighth chair in the jury box, where the truck driver glowered, and the district attorney queried hurriedly:

"Can you recall any further details of the man's personal appearance?"

"His lips were extraordinarily red, and he had hands as small as a woman's. I noticed them particularly, for he kept moving them nervously, as if he was excited. That is all I remember, but he impressed me most unpleasantly."

"Did you notice him again after you showed him to the pew?"

"Only at the end of the ceremony. He was the first to leave the church directly behind the bridal couple, and I felt again that I had made a mistake in admitting him."

"Have you seen this man since, Mr. Lamont?"

The witness nodded solemnly and his countenance took on the hue of a ripe tomato.

"When?"

"At eight o'clock this morning."

"Where?"

"In the morgue."

The reply came with shocking abruptness to every one but Claudia and her counsel, and a slight commotion arose in the court room until sternly quelled by the gavel.

"You positively identify the body you saw in the morgue this morning as that of the man you admitted to the wedding without a card?"

"I do."

"The defendant's witness." The district attorney had made his climax with a fine regard for dramatic values, but when Matthew Rowe got leisurely out of his chair he proceeded, in his benign, cheerfully courteous voice to render the witness more uncomfortable still.

Despite numerous objections from the prosecution, Mr. Lamont wasn't sure the man said he had come from the "West" after all; it might have been "East." No, he hadn't had a Western accent; not any, in fact. Witness couldn't be certain, either, about his excitement; perhaps it was only his manner. Pressed as to the unpleasant impression he had received, Mr. Lamont found that he could not explain it to his own or any one's else comprehension, and finally retracted the statement completely in injured dignity.

With the exception of number eight, whose desire to know what the witness called a "gentleman" was overruled, the jury was too stunned by the identification of the body in the morgue to offer any questions, and Mr. Lamont left the stand with alacrity.

His place was taken by a sharp-featured, shabbily dressed woman with a draggled feather hanging from her storm-beaten hat down over one eye. She was Mrs. Delia Toohey, and "went out by the day;" she had been in the crowd outside the church, right at the curb beside the awning when the bride and groom came out, and she'd seen the gentleman plain who'd followed them out and took Mr. Hamersley's arm. He was small-like and dark, but grand looking, even if he did act worried. Mr. Hamersley seemed surprised, but greeted him real quiet and friendly, and afterward he looked worried, too. She hadn't heard nothing the man said, he spoke so low, but being right at the automobile door, as you might say, she did get a few words when Mr. Hamersley spoke to the bride.

"—something unforeseen—leave the city to-day—I will come to you—mustn't delay—home and wait."

She couldn't guess what it meant, of course, but she crowded forward and saw the bride nod, real sorrowful looking.

Then Mr. Hamersley spoke to the chauffeur, but she couldn't catch what he said, and the automobile rolled away.

Asked if she had seen this man since, Mrs. Toohey replied with an emphatic negative. If by that was meant the poor creature she'd been made to look at in the morgue that morning, it wasn't him at all, and nothing like him, barring that he was short and dark complected.

Cross-examination by Mr. Rowe served to emphasize the gentleman's worried look when he followed from the church, and Mr. Hamersley's "friendly" greeting of him but sad expression after they'd spoken together, and the fact of the bride's nod at some question from the groom. She was quite positive about the bride's sorrowful look, too, as if they'd heard some bad news.

The last remark, freely volunteered, satisfied the attorney, and he seated himself with a bland smile as Policeman Peter Ellis was sworn.

Claudia gazed wonderingly at Uncle Matt. Why had he ignored the reference to the morgue and the dead man there, and asked no questions of either witness concerning him? She saw the point which the district attorney was endeavoring to bring out, and could realize before this policeman spoke what must be coming. Was Uncle Matt going to allow the prosecution to prove that its dead witness had been the man at the church?

Officer Ellis testified that he had been patrolling his beat during the wind storm on the morning of the previous day, when up near the bridge a laborer shouted that there was a floater in the water. He had rung up an ambulance and then superintended getting the body out of the river. The man wasn't over five foot five, and couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and thirty or so in life, he said. He was dark, with black hair and eyes, and a flat nose; might have been taken for a hunkie or one of them foreigners, only he was dressed up like a swell, with a real diamond in his tie. He had the littlest hands that Officer Ellis had ever seen on a man, and they didn't look as if they'd ever done a stroke of work.

At this juncture the district attorney abruptly turned him over to the defense, but the latter, it appeared, still failed to take any interest in this line of evidence and the witness was permitted to leave the stand without a question.

A subdued murmur of surprise broke out among the spectators and Claudia's quick glance at the jury showed that many of them shared her own secret amazement. But the next name bawled out by the clerk of the court sent her thoughts quickly into another channel.

"Dr. Van Tuyl."

Her own physician! But he knew nothing about Zorn. Was he to be questioned about that day when Annie had summoned him hastily to the house—the day of Niles's death?

Her eyes blurred as the familiar figure of the old family doctor mounted to the stand and the kindly voice she had known since childhood took the oath. Was he avoiding her gaze? He kept his eyes resolutely fastened on the district attorney and awaited the first question with simple, natural dignity.

"Were you present at the wedding of Niles Hamersley and Claudia Langham?"

"Yes."

"Have you made a professional call at Mrs. Hamersley's home since that event?"

"Yes. On the afternoon of the following day."

"Who sent for you?"

"The maid, Annie Booth. I was out on a visit, but when I returned my resident nurse informed me she had telephoned, speaking for Mrs. Hamersley; Mr. Hamersley had met with a serious accident and I was requested to come immediately." Dr. Van Tuyl spoke very slowly, as though giving each word due consideration.

"At what time did you receive this message, doctor?"

"At a little after six. I recall it distinctly, because I had been delayed on a serious case and was late for my office hours. A number of patients were waiting for me, but on receiving that message I turned them over to my assistant and hurried to Mrs. Hamersley's home."

"Who admitted you?"

"The butler, George." Dr. Van Tuyl was apparently on the point of continuing, but checked himself and waited, still eying his questioner with grave attention.

"What did he say to you?" The district attorney flashed a quick glance toward the counsel for the defense as though in anticipation of an objection, but Matthew Rowe smiled broadly and inclined his head in seemingly amused assent.

"I spoke first," the doctor replied. "I asked him where my patient was and he said: "Upstairs, sir. I'll show you! He led me to a bedroom on the third floor. Mr. Hamersley was lying there, dead."

"Was any one in the room with the body?"

"Yes, sir. Annie the maid and Mr. Matthew Rowe."

"Ah!" The district attorney paused for emphasis. "Mr. Matthew Rowe, the senior counsel for the defense whom you see before you?"

"Yes, sir." Dr. Van Tuyl's gently courteous tone did not change a shade, but his meaning was unmistakable. "Mr. Matthew Rowe, the attorney for two generations of the Langham family."

"What was Mr. Matthew Rowe doing?" The question came with peremptory haste.

"When I entered the room where Mr. Hamersley's body lay? He was standing beside it, looking down."

"Who spoke first?"

"Annie the maid. I do not recall exactly what she said, it was merely an ejaculation: 'Here's the doctor!' Just something like that. Mr. Rowe looked at me then and said: 'This is a frightful thing, doctor!' I didn't answer, but knelt down beside the body to examine it. Then I saw the revolver."

"What revolver?"

"One that was lying almost beneath Mr. Hamersley's right hand."

"May it please the court I should like to introduce this weapon as evidence." The district attorney suddenly produced, with an effective flourish, the revolver which Claudia had last seen in the hand of Niles Hamersley as his body fell and a little quiver ran over her, but in the slight pause that followed Quincey Dreyer leaned toward her.

"There's our new witness." The words reached her ear alone. "The witness for the defense!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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SUPPLICATION

CLOTHO, you who sit and spin
Sorrow's web for me—
Gossamer the threads and thin—
Will you never weave therein
Aught but tragedy?

Lachesis, whose skillful hand
Guides the flax so fine!
Can it be you have not planned
One gay filament or strand
In my life's design?

Atropos, who must some day
Cut the thread! Forbear,
For a little yet, I pray,
Till some color with the gray
Has been woven there!

Mazie V. Caruthers.

Little Dark Ships

By ALBERT DORRINGTON

LITTLE Kum Ling sat cross-legged in the darkness, his glance fixed on the candlenut flare in midstream. Now the darkness of Beetle Creek, at midnight, was enough to make a Chinaman blink and fumble. Above his head was a solid canopy of mangrove forest. Not a star gleam penetrated the quiltlike roof of dripping foliage.

Out in the black scum of the river floated a barrel-shaped cage. From the top of this wire cage burned the candlenut flare. Four stakes driven into the mud held the cage in position. For years little Kum Ling had sat thus, peering through the Stygian gloom, listening to the *chut-chut* of the Papuan poison drip, oozing from every root and reef that bordered the impenetrable swamp.

And always with the same happy result. For out of the mud and slime of innumerable centuries came that which Kum Ling most needed, money and gifts, light and opium. Also it brought him the love of his children and the blessing of his aged father in Soo Loon.

Kum's legs had warped like Cupid's bow through watching the face of the creek. Yet in a little while he would be free to pass his evenings on the divan of fat Ming Boh at Samarai, where the smoke of heaven smoothed the warps and stifled the five squealing devils in a man's heart.

Suddenly the flare on top of the cage in midstream began to jazz and shiver in the sheer joy of motion. Kum batted his eyes and grinned.

The jazz motion increased to a frantic, witchlike dance. It was as if a thousand horses were straining to snap the cage from its moorings. Up and down and round it milled in a whirlwind of mud and white fire. Kum crouched low to avoid the blasts of water and stones showered to the bank.

In a little while the flare grew steady enough to reveal a twelve-foot alligator floating dead on the surface of the creek, its great snout imprisoned in the open shaft of the barrel-like cage.

With a long boathook Kum unhitched the cage from the four stakes and drew the huge saurian to the bank.

Always these monsters of the mud were attracted by his midnight flares. And the

flare could only be properly investigated after the inquisitive one had thrust his snout into the tunnel of temptation. Always this night magic had to be sniffed at close range. And never once had the long, thin blade of steel omitted to shoot up into the soft throat, the moment the saurian tried to withdraw.

Kum anchored his catch to the bank, and in the light of the flare stripped the hide from the warm, flinching carcass. It was a tedious business in that sweltering gehenna of mangroves and mosquitoes. But the clean-stripped hide meant gold from the check book of the Sydney merchants; it meant one day closer to the life of ease and rest he had promised himself in the near future.

Moreover, there were certain parts of the white flesh that tasted like chicken when fried in his copper pan. A little pepper and boiled rice added made it a dish fit for a mandarin.

"Five pons for the pelt," he muttered. "Twenty more pelts an' I finish. Under these devil trees the air is black. My lungs grow weak. But my children go to school, my father blesses me. What does the bad air matter!"

The dawn showed like a tiger's robe flung across the naked east. The sea mirrored each tawny smear of the far-stretched robe until it changed to the milk-white garment of day.

Above the booming note of surf Kum caught the crisp sound of a naked foot on the pebbles. The little Chinaman peered from his hut door at a white man, standing ten yards away in the shelter of a bhutang tree. He was young and half naked. Down the smooth length of his boyish limbs were the red scars from the reefs he had struck. His skin was biscuit brown; his dark hair dripped brine and weeds.

He stared hard and inquiringly at the Chinaman, like one counting the last throw in a desperate gamble.

"Hello, Chink!" he said without moving nearer. "Got any grub, or coffee—in the name of God? I'm beat!"

Just here his young legs seemed to abandon him. He fell in a heap in the sand.

It is said that pity entered the Chinaman with the dawn of the human race. Ling knelt beside the boy and poured some whisky through his clenched teeth. Then he chafed his wrists, and with the instinct that is older than the apes, he massaged the flesh under the faintly beating heart.

"You come along just now," he said cheerfully. "Plenty coffee, bymby. Hi, ho; you sit up, boy! Sun too strong, heah!"

Instead of sitting up, the boy slept for five hours, like one whose body has been beaten and drugged. Over his half naked limbs the Chinaman placed a screen of palm fronds to shelter him from the blistering sun.

When he woke the Chinaman was holding a cup of strong coffee to his lips. The boy sat up and with curious glances at the sun, uttered a suppressed cry.

Kum patted his arm soothingly. "You keepee quiet. Takee pull. Why fo' you worry?" he spoke with almost womanly tenderness.

Gulping the coffee, the boy ate ravenously of some fried bananas and rice placed before him in a tin pannikin. Between each hurried mouthful his eyes made lightning darts across the surf line, where the reef formed a whaleback silhouette against the sun's fiery rays.

"I'm going to remember you as a pal, Chink," he said at last. "And I'll say it of your kind," he added with an effort, "you never put it over a white man!"

The Chinaman's soft eyes explored the shreds of canvas clothing that clung to the other's body, a wan smile crinkling his saffron face.

"You bin in chokee!" he intoned with a sigh. "Wha' fo'?"

The boy's shoulders twitched, while the ghost of a grin touched his dry lips. "For killing a man, Chink! Name of Conlon," he added with startling brevity. Then, as if overcome by his undue lapse into speech, shook himself like a collie that has taken a thrashing.

"I'm as full of sea water as a bilge pipe," he confided after another cup of coffee. "And those bluenose sharks are man hunters, too!"

"You swim heah?" The Chinaman's eyes widened in stark amaze.

"How else? Boats are not included in chokee regulations. The last prisoner who made his get-away through the swamps is still in the mud. Slipped through a porridge hole among the big eels," he added with fervor. "I took my chance with the sharks!"

"Why fo' you run away?" Kum demanded blandly.

The boy chafed the reef wounds on his hips and body thoughtfully, and again the apologetic grin softened his tense, drawn features. His fingers played about a tiny miniature, fastened by a string to his wrist. The sea water had softened the knot that held it there. He regarded it thoughtfully.

"Why does a man run away from prison? Why does a man limp out of hell? Ask the sharks and the eels, Chink. They're good guessers."

The Chinaman shrugged and was silent.

From the forest track that led to the interior came the long drawn baying of hounds. The sounds rose in fleeting sobs and died away somewhere in the black smudge of bhutang jungle in the north.

The boy nodded and grinned again. "The police and the pups!" he said softly. "Blood money for the black trackers when they get me, Chink! What's the betting?"

Despite his easy manner the Chinaman detected a flash of despair in his eyes. Well he knew that the Samarai police were on the fellow's trail. Not a reef or palm belt within fifty miles of Malanga jail would remain unexplored by the sleuths of the law.

Moreover Kum Ling had known Mike Conlon in his day, and was dimly aware that the noted desperado had met his death at the hands of one Chard, a schooner hand in the employ of Conlon. A year before the noise of the affair had blown over the North Australian parts and around the pearling banks of Thursday Island. But beyond arousing a few caustic press comments anent the growing slackness of the police administration of New Guinea in general, the incident was forgotten. Even Kum Ling could not remember the cause of the shooting.

The voices of men and the baying of dogs converged slowly but surely in the direction of Beetle Creek. The Chinaman shuffled in and out of the hut uneasily.

"Maybe they come heah!" he muttered. "Yet there is no trail of him across the water!" He walked to where Chard still crouched in the beach sand and eyed him narrowly. "The police are comin'!" he announced gravely. "There is no place for you to hide!"

Chard leaped to his feet, but the Chinaman's hand restrained him. "Yo' make blood trail foh the dogs if yo' move flom heah!" he warned. "Why make trail?"

Chard remained rooted, his shapely bare feet planted in the incoming tide.

"That's sense," he answered with a quickening of his numbed faculties. "And —what next?" he questioned almost wistfully.

"No next if yo' move an inch!" the Chinaman told him. "Keep your dam feet in the water!"

It seemed hours before the Chinaman spoke. The clamor in the bhutang forest grew louder each moment. Ever nearer it drifted. The high pitched voice of the tracker, at variance with the dogs, beat shrilly on the tense silence of the beach.

Kum listened until he caught the sound of a white man's voice calling angrily to the dogs. He turned quickly to the expectant Chard.

"One white feller, commissioner of police is heah! Mistah Lester. Welly big man. He come to catch yo' himself! Him one great man in New Guinea. Evelybody kow tow to Mistah Lester!" the Chinaman babbled in his excitement. "He no likee me fo' havin' yo' heah!"

"Damn him!" Chard fumed. Already he felt the iron bracelets clicking over his wrists.

"They are comin'!" the Chinaman quavered. "One black fellow tracker, two dogs an' Mistah Lester!"

Kum's glance wandered across the beach and back to the Stygian gloom within the mangroves. Well he knew there was no hiding place the Papuan tracker could not ferret out. And Kum was certain that this straight limbed boy criminal had made up

his mind to finish his woes on this clean strip of beach. There would be no going back to Malanga jail. He was going to fight, and that would mean a speedy close to his young life. The bloodhounds and the black tracker would kill him like a hare.

The Chinaman's glance settled on the unsullied alligator hide, pegged out in front of the hut. He gestured frantically to Chard.

"Yo' keep your feet in the water, an' walk along to creek. Savvy? Quick; along creek, yo' heah?"

Chard met his glance and saw something of the death comedy in his soft, slant eyes. But Chard obeyed.

Kum Ling dragged the big, twelve-foot hide through the rotting grass until the darkness of the mangroves was reached. Chard waded thigh deep through the mud and reeds, and then halted, watching the Chinaman with fierce, questing eyes.

Two hundred yards away, in the bhutang scrub, the short-clipped voice of the police commissioner was heard, rating the black tracker. The two bloodhounds thrashed from the scrub and ran in the direction of the hut.

"Lie down!" the Chinaman commanded Chard.

"In this filthy mush?" the jail breaker objected, squirming at the thought of the viscid horrors that lurked underfoot.

"Lie down!" the Chinaman insisted. "Me chuck this skin ovah yo'! Maybe they pass it by. Maybe not. Allee same yo' get one chance foh your life. Lie down!"

In a flash Chard understood. Flinging himself down in the mud, he allowed the Chinaman to stretch the skin of the bull alligator over him. Very carefully Kum Ling folded the pliant hide about Chard's supple limbs, adjusting the head and throat piece with the skill of a taxidermist.

Then he paused to scrutinize the effect of his work. Within the gloom of the mangrove swamp it would have been difficult for an inexperienced onlooker to single out the skin from the network of roots that enmeshed it.

"Lie still, boy! The black tracker man is Motuan. He worship alligator allee same as Chinaman worship joss!" he chuckled. "Tracker no disturb yo' unless—"

"That damned white commissioner and his dogs dig me out!" came in muffled tones from the hide. "I'll lie still enough. Here they come! Get!"

A pair of bloodhounds loped through the hut door and remained sniffing and panting, their jowls adrip. Kum Ling stirred the coffee in the iron pot over the fire. He was about to add a pinch of salt to the bubbling brown mass in the pot, when his glance shifted to the clean cut figure of Commissioner Lester in the doorway.

Ling dropped the salt into the coffee and wiped his fingers on his neckcloth. Then he salaamed obsequiously.

The young commissioner of police observed him casually, and then spoke sharply to the intruding hounds. Instantly they ran out into the open to join the flat-browed native tracker skulking in the shadows of a bunya palm. Lester was in his thirtieth year; his saddle-brown skin spoke of his restless campaigns against the lawless black and white men who clung to the forests and rivers with apelike tenacity.

His face marked him as a humanitarian with a flair for order and settlement. In the senate of the commonwealth his name stood for square dealing and justice. He glanced around the hut and nodded to the expectant Ling.

"Plenty alligators in the creek, Kum!" he greeted. "By and by you'll be bringing your family to help in the daily work," he added encouragingly.

The Chinaman's head wagged like a spring-fitted image at Lester's genial remarks. "Yes, sah, I bring um lille Ling boys to help catchum alligator. Alligator one big fool, sah, to fuss round um light. In goes his silly head. Click, clack goes the knife under his neck when he pulls away. Harder him pull, harder goes the knife. My word him one dam fool!" he added with Celestial gusto.

Lester was not the man to ask questions about escaped prisoners. His searching eyes ranged the creek banks, the beach, and the flat, foot-beaten tracks around the hut.

The bloodhounds had joined the native

tracker. For a while they ran about, disturbed by the scent of the dead alligator.

Lester joined them, and stood with his face to the beach where the westering sun was aflame on the edge of a silvery cloud bank.

A sudden cry from the tracker swung him round. The fellow was holding a tiny miniature in his hand. It hung from a bit of loose string and had evidently fallen to the beach.

Lester snatched it from the tracker's trembling fingers, and stared at it with eyes that blazed darkly at the smiling face of the girl inset. Thrusting the miniature into his pocket, he walked from the beach, calling the dogs and tracker after him.

But the bloodhounds had become interested in a long, spiny object that sprawled in the mud-belt beneath the mangroves. Barking furiously, they circled within a few feet of the immovable saurian that remained still as a rock under their baying challenges.

Just here a curious thing happened. From the black slime of a bank in mid creek waddled a full-grown alligator. With scarcely a ripple it drove through the stagnant water, its great snout churning within a yard of the booming hounds.

With fear crushing his heart, Ling peered across the intervening space, and suppressed a chuckle of delight. Well he knew that the live monster was the mate of the dead bull alligator. Lester had halted and was watching results.

The two hounds were not to be denied. One of them had grabbed the head of the dead saurian, and with tigerish strength sought to drag it up the bank. But the head remained glued as though a live force was holding it in place.

Commissioner Lester watched with growing interest. But the unexpected was at hand. The tail of the live saurian whipped round under the feet of the hide-tearing hound. The stroke was unexpected, and the dog was hurled far out into the mud, the half-maddened alligator clashing and snapping on its heels.

The native tracker ran to the bank, gesticulating hysterically. "*Ona pa nonga!*" he called to the half stunned hound.

The hound crawled ashore and ran from the saberlike jaws that threatened to dismember it. Lester watched in silence, a sharp frown lining his brow. He signed to the tracker impatiently.

"Almost the dogs were trapped!" he admonished in the vernacular. "Return, thou, to headquarters with them." He whispered some instructions in the fellow's ear.

Calling to the fretting hounds, the tracker turned to the bush trail leading to Putak and disappeared.

Very slowly the commissioner walked to the creek and halted beside the motionless hide. Stooping, he shook the scaly head, and then with an effort, flung it back.

With a catlike spring Chard leaped out, the muscles of his young body gathered for a clinch with his relentless pursuer.

Lester's service revolver covered him in the slant of an eye.

"There's positively nothing doing, Chard!" he said quietly. "You are mine—for keeps!"

II.

CHARD'S breast labored painfully. The blinding sweat and mud from the mangroves obscured his vision. He rocked and swayed dizzily, and then steadied himself with an effort.

"All right!" he choked. "I've led you a dance. Only for those dogs I'd have beaten you and your damned administration!"

The commissioner pocketed his revolver like one certain of his man. He walked slowly across the beach, Chard following mechanically. At the water's edge he waited in the tense, hot silence for Lester to speak.

The commissioner beckoned the Chinaman. "Bring your table here, Ling. That old biscuit box will do for a seat."

Kum Ling obeyed tremblingly. Seated before the rough table, Lester placed some papers at his elbow and cleared his throat.

"A year ago, Chard, you were tried in the courthouse at Samarai, for the shooting of Mike Conlon. Is there any reason why the judge's sentence of penal servitude for life should not be carried out?"

Chard was standing six feet away from the table. He looked up with the jerk of a lashed steer at the cold eyed commissioner, seated on the biscuit box. A weary, scoffing smile split the dry mask of mud about his boyish lips.

"You're funnier than the old mummy in the court who threw me among the convicts at Poison River—for life, Mr. Commissioner! You know what the black gang is like out on those swamps!"

Lester flinched and twisted the papers under his elbow. "I've asked you a question," he said sternly. "The swamp and the black gangs at Poison River are still there—if you don't answer!"

Chard quaked to his reef-scarred heels. For an instant his brain reeled in the blind vertigo that catches men before they die. The white moisture of his agony crawled through the caked mud slits under his eyes.

"There was a reason why I shot Mike Conlon, Mr. Commissioner!" he faltered and stopped.

"It was never given at your trial. What was the reason?" Lester's face had become as pitiless as the mask of a savage. He was civilization's last gesture in that abode of crime and cunning. He was there to sift, punish or redress the bitter wrongs of native and white man alike.

Chard's eyes became alive with sudden understanding. This man was not like the others—the gang of courthouse wolves who had mocked and jeered at his silence, a silence forced upon him by the vicious minded old judge who had sought to drag a young girl's name into a story that reeked of crime! And in a court packed with the scum of the ports, yellow men and black, all agog for the name of the white girl for whom Chard had fired his fatal shot!

Chard's voice sounded clear in the silence. Behind his stiff, erect figure, the sun stooped like a huge blood drop to the rim of the sea.

"The reason I shot Conlon was for the reason that men shoot iron lizards and the snakes over there!" His hands gestured away to the mud bank. "I was a supercargo on board Conlon's schooner, White Witch. It was my second trip and last. I found that Conlon was owned body and soul by a slaver named Van Galt, in Songolo.

"Van Galt owns a dozen dives and gambling houses in Songolo and Macassar. He keeps scores of girls in his orchestras and saloons. It looks respectable until you see a list of his agencies that end in the cinnabar boats and the slave hells of Malay!

"I'm just a man like you, Mr. Commissioner. I didn't spend my employer's time fussing around the old wops and drunks who used to fill Van Galt's dives. But I jibbed at the cinnabar boats—manned by French convicts from Noumea—and the bleached sepulchres Van Galt made of the men and women who fell into his black holds.

"Well, the White Witch lay off Putak, one night, in October. Conlon asked me to go ashore and wait orders for cargo. Only a week before I had picked up a letter from Van Galt to Conlon. It was full of instructions for the carrying off of a white girl from Putak, and two others from Port Moresby."

The commissioner put his hand to his lips as though a blood drop had welled from his heart. He did not speak. Chard continued:

"Conlon had friends everywhere; in the courthouses, in the customs, and among the native police. Van Galt's money did the tickling. And in a beach town like Putak, ten pounds will get a man or woman tied by the feet!

"Now, I knew the name of the girl in Putak, Mr. Commissioner. Her father's store had its back fence on the beach. Never mind who she is. She'd never heard of Van Galt or Conlon, or me or a score of other damned loafers ready to link her name with blackbirders and slave agents.

"Therefore, Mr. Commissioner, I bring you to that back fence that ran down to the beach. Instead of joining the boys in Rafferty's whisky shop, I burrowed into the sand and waited for Conlon to come right up to the fence. He came with the good old blanket on his arm, in case the young lady might start screaming. The schooner's dingy stood ready to pick him up, once he was clear of the house with the girl.

"It occurred to me, Mr. Commissioner, that I might wait until he came out with the girl struggling in his arms. It was past midnight, and some of Conlon's friends had been making merry with her father at Rafferty's bar. To put it finely they had made the get-away clear for Conlon."

The commissioner stirred uneasily. "Why didn't you go to the police?" he hazarded. "Unfortunately, I was away!"

Chard inclined his head. "There were two native police officers at Putak. Although I knew they were in Conlon's pay I could not prove it. If I had spoken to them, a prison door would have closed on me while Conlon finished his work. I took a lone hand chance.

"So I lay in the sand, under the fence, and heard Conlon stepping over the reef. He was drunk and unsteady, but not too drunk to climb the fence leading to her room.

"She had retired an hour before. I had seen her shadow on the blinds. Conlon crawled to the open window, and stood fumbling with the chloroform rags he carried. I—dropped over the fence and called to him quietly. At first he did not hear my voice. But at sight of me he sobered and came at me with the rush of a madman.

"I fell over a tree stump and lay half stunned, while he tried to suffocate me with those beastly rags he carried. He was alive to all the tricks of the trade, Mr. Commissioner. No man in the islands could handle the blanket and the anesthetic like Conlon! He was as heavy as a Queensland buffalo, and could use his weight like a Jap.

"That was fair enough, but I jibbed at the blanket and the stink of the chloroform. So I pulled the only trick I had and shot him while there was time!

"Yes, Mr. Commissioner, I'd shoot such men at a shilling a dozen!"

It was almost dark now. The sea had turned to an oily smear, where the saber-winged hawks planed above the surf, squalling over some eager morsel snatched from the sandbars and inlets.

The Chinaman shuffled in and out of the smoke-filled hut, his eyes slanting toward the dim figure of the prisoner on the beach, and at the silent, tense browed commissioner of police, his hands clenched over the papers on the table.

He rose from the biscuit box, after what seemed like an eternity to the slow breathing Chinaman. In his hand he held the miniature of the smiling lipped young girl.

"Tell me, Chard," he said hoarsely, "where you found this?" He held up the miniature between his finger and thumb.

A sharp expulsion of breath came from the young convict as he stared at the face of the girl in the miniature. A curious, pensive blindness clouded his dark eyes as he answered.

"It was handed to me by a tot of a native child, one day at Poison River, while I was working with the gang. I don't know who sent it, and—I have never seen her in my life! But—it sweetened the air of Poison River. It was like a flower sent to a man in hell, God bless her!"

Slowly and with the air of one about to consummate an unthinkable act, the commissioner of police strode to Chard's side. For the millionth fraction of time the eyes of the two men cleaved the abyss of misunderstanding and lies that had yawned between them.

"Chard!" Lester's voice had lost its blade-edge intensity. It had grown mellow, but no less firm. "You were right about the men of Putak and the women they are supposed to protect. I am going to ask you to degrade yourself a little, by—"

"Say it!" Chard flung out, his shoulders braced as if for a blow. "Say it and be damned!"

"I want you, Chard," the commissioner spoke as though he had heard "I want you to give me your hand!"

III.

Darkness fell over the jungle-clad coast. A white launch swept into the inlet and made fast to the bank. The commissioner of police emerged from the hut accompanied by Chard.

For a heart-breathing space the two remained silent, while the slow beat of the tide marched with their thoughts into eternity. It was Lester who spoke.

"The launch will take you to Port

Moresby. From there your passage to Sydney will be arranged. Write to me sometimes. Tell me about your people and yourself. Good-by!!"

Chard halted with his foot on the launch's rail, his hand gripping Lester's.

"If you ever meet her in this life, say that I am content—that we passed each other like the dark ships in the night. And the ocean is wide! Good-by, sir!"

The launch disappeared in the blue darkness of the Papuan night.

Slowly, very slowly, Lester returned to the hut and found the Chinaman huddled over the smoky fire, for the air had grown chilly.

Kum looked up into the white man's face, a question palpitating on his heathen lips, for Lester was still holding the miniature in his trembling fingers.

"That—that lille lady I know welly well, sah! Her father keep um store in Putak!" He pointed an accusing finger at the miniature. "She—"

"Is now my wife, Ling! And pretty happy as things go!" The commissioner of police gathered his papers from the table, which the Chinaman had brought in from the beach, and braced himself for his journey home through the forest. "Good night, Ling!"

He swung out into the bush track, halting a moment on the wooded rise for a final glimpse of the launch's pinhead light, fast disappearing over the skyline.

"And they passed each other like dark ships in the night!" he echoed with a sigh. "Never to meet, and somehow missing each other through all eternity! Thank goodness Eileen's happy! As for him—he's glad to be out of it!"

He turned again to the starlit trail, where the home lights beckoned, and the laughing eyed little girl wife sat waiting.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

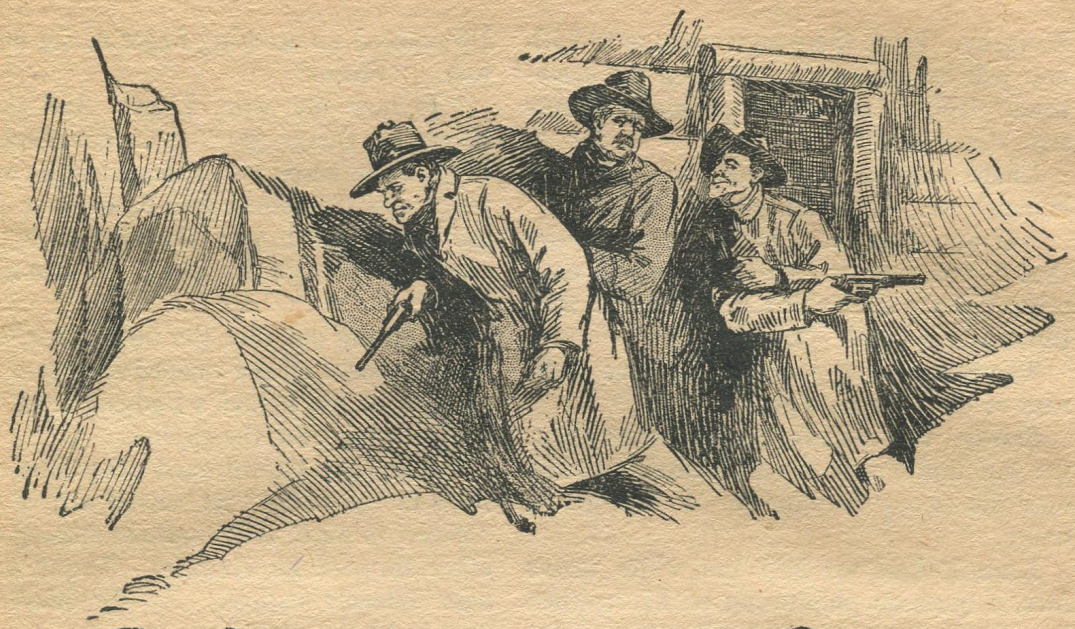
I'VE not forgotten how it stands
In fields that summer suns made sweet,
Where trees make music secretly
With roses in its friendly hands
And wild, small gardens at its feet,
And just beyond its door—the sea.

Not long ago the sea waves broke
With gallant song against the beach,
And bees hummed all day at the pane,
Its chimneys showed gray, feathered smoke,
And summer moons glowed, colored peach,
Or there was slanting, silver rain.

But now the winds as blue as steel—
The winter winds, sharp as a knife,
Have cut the last red rose away,
On golden feet dear, dead dreams wheel
Where once they knew a glowing life
And through dark halls old memories stray.

The snow lies thick on every field,
No smoke invades the quiet air,
The sea waves beat in fruitless pain,
The gardens naught but silence yield,
And I, that once knew rapture there
Shall not invade its paths again.

Faith Baldwin.



Cheddar Cheese

By FRANCIS LYNDE

Author of "A Glorious Fool," "David Vallory," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

RED BLOOD.

THE cause for the disappearance of the red light became apparent as soon as the racing roadster reached the place where they had had their final glimpse of the small signal. The road, fairly distinguishable, now that the moonlight was picking it out, had entered upon a winding course among the foothills of the mountain range and its crookings, limiting the view ahead, added a new peril to the pursuit.

"Here is where we take our lives in our hands, Jimmie, dear," Della remarked as she swung the heavy car to right and left around the short curvings of the road. "They have had to stop once for repairs, and if they do it again, we'll be into them before we know it."

Her unperturbed courage was contagious. Barrett drew his weapon from its holster and was surprised to find that his nerves were quite steady; now that the crisis was approaching his only anxiety was for the safety of his companion. If the men in the car ahead were the desperate characters there was now every reason to believe they were, they would probably open fire at once if they should be overtaken.

"Listen," he urged; "I want you to do exactly as I tell you. If we should find them stopped again and run up on them unexpectedly, you slide down out of sight where the machinery under the hood will protect you from their bullets. Will you do that?"

"I hear what you say," was the noncommittal answer.

"But will you do as I say?"

"I'll take care of myself—yes."

"One more question," he thrust in hurriedly. "I don't know very much about weapons: do I have to cock this thing first—or will it fire if I just pull the trigger?"

"Just pull," she instructed, without tak-

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ing her eyes for an instant off the winding road. "It's a double action. And hold it low—under what you're shooting at. Until you have learned the balance of a gun it will always jump a little and shoot high."

He marveled at the coolness with which she gave these directions while she was whisking the storming car at breakneck speed around the twistings and turnings in the hilly road. And although they had not yet regained enough of the touring car's lead to bring it in sight again it was with a sigh of relief that he found Della checking the headlong pace at the bottom of one of the hills where the road crossed a trickling stream.

"Water," she said, stopping the car with its front wheels in the stream. "I don't dare to try another hill climb without filling the tank. When we get into the mountains it will be all uphill."

Barrett sprang out, got the canvas bucket out of the deck locker and, working rapidly under her directions, replenished the water supply. The enforced stop was not long, but minutes even on the poor road might easily mean half miles in increasing the lead of the car ahead and thus further complicate matters.

"Half a tank—that's enough," she announced; and as Barrett climbed to his place she opened the throttle again and the race was resumed.

A short half mile beyond the ravine of the creek the road left the foothills and began to climb the backgrounding mountains, looping the gulch heads in thick timber and doubling the points of the shouldering spurs.

Barrett wondered why a fairly practicable road should have been made in such an isolated wilderness, but the query answered itself shortly when they began to pass, along the foot of the upper slopes, wide stretches from which the timber had been cut. Evidently, the road had once been an outlet for a lumbering company.

Della, bent over the wheel in a ceaseless effort to steer fine enough to keep from plunging the car over the precipices that threatened all the way along, spoke only once in the storming climb and that was to ask Barrett how far he thought it might be to the cabin.

"I can't tell," he answered. "I can only guess from the height we've reached. It can't be much farther now."

As he spoke, the climax they had been more than half expecting leaped out at them. As the roadster rounded a sharp curve they both saw the red light signal less than a hundred yards ahead and it was standing still. Luckily, the curve was on a stiff upgrade, so the roadster was brought to a stop within its length. With admirable presence of mind, Della put the engine in reverse and let the car roll silently backward down the grade and out of sight around the curve and at a safe distance she stopped and set the brakes.

"Did they see us?" was her first whispered query.

Barrett had pocketed the electric torch and was softly unlatching the door on his side. "I think not," he answered. "They would have fired at us if they had."

"What are you going to do?"

"This is our chance—or rather mine. We can't be far from the cabin, and they are evidently stalled again — something wrong with their car. I'll cut around and get in ahead of them. There is the one chance in a million that the money may be cached in the old tunnel and if I can get to it first and find it and get away with it while they are stopping here tinkering their car, it will be that much to the good. While I'm gone, you back down until you can find a safe place to turn around and then you'll be ready to make a run for it when the time comes."

"And let you go and get killed all by yourself?" she replied indignantly. "I think I see myself doing anything like that! I'm going with you."

It was quite in vain that he argued, pleaded, begged while the precious moments wasted themselves.

"I'd much rather die with you than live without you, Jimsie, dear," was all the answer he could get; and in the end he yielded as the bridegroom of a day must. "All right," he consented at length; "if you must, you must. But I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to you. Come on; what we do must be done quickly."

Fortunately for the detouring experiment

the stop had been made at a spot where the timber grew thickly and leaving the car as it stood they turned aside from the road on the up-mountain slope and climbed among the trees to a safe height before venturing to press forward. Having taken this precaution, they were well up on the forested slope when they passed the stalled touring car.

As they looked down upon it the moonlight enabled them to see that the hood was lifted and that both of the occupants were out and doing something to the machinery. Cautiously they crept on, holding a course parallel to the road and still well above it. After going only a short distance beyond the stalled car they saw a dark figure coming down the road at a brisk walk.

"The third man!" Della whispered; and they stopped and stood motionless among the trees until the figure disappeared around a bend in the road.

"That clears the field for us!" said Barrett jubilantly. "A little time is all we need now—but we're not likely to have any too much of that. They'll get that car going again in a few minutes, and then it will be all over but the shouting—or the shooting. I wish to the Lord you had stayed with the roadster. That one little thing is all I lack of being happy."

"Yes; and a nice time I'd be having, wouldn't I?" she retorted. "It's no use; you can't shake me off, Jimmie, dear. I'm a part of you now and I'll be with you at the finish, whatever it may be."

They reached the little plateau upon which the deserted cabin stood sooner than they expected to. It was such a perilously short distance up the road from where the two men—or probably the three, by this time—were still tinkering at the stopped car.

Barrett led the way around to the front of the log shack. The door was standing open, and a handful of fire was burning upon the hearth. Obviously the third man had been camping in the cabin.

Beside the door there was a cracker box transformed into a bird cage with slats nailed across its open side. Barrett snapped the switch of the flashlight and a pair of pigeons stirred uneasily in the corner of the box coop and crooned their *tuck-a-too-too*.

"That is the other end of their wireless," he said. Then, turning the light into the cabin: "I don't suppose there is any use in our wasting time here. If they've hidden the money it will be in a safer place than this."

"The mine tunnel?" the young woman suggested.

"Most probably. We'll see."

It was only a short distance to the dark hole in the slope behind the cabin. As they stood together under the rotting timber portal, Barrett recalled the brief glimpse he had had of the place in the flare of a single match before dawn on the morning of his escape. Under the beam of the electric flash lamp nothing new was revealed. A few feet beyond the entrance the roof had fallen in, and a mass of broken rock and earth quite filled the tunnel, although the gaping chasm overhead, out of which the cave-in had fallen, appeared to offer a passageway to the depths beyond where they stood.

"Will you hide out among the trees and wait for me while I climb and see what I can find?" Barrett asked, pleading again.

"Not I!" was the shuddering reply. "Don't you see what that would m-make me do? If they should come up while you were in there, I'd simply have to shoot them d-down, one at a time, to keep them from getting at you! You wouldn't make me do such a dreadful thing as that, would you? I'd be-be obliged to, you know."

"You brave little soldier!" he exclaimed in husbandly exultation. "I believe you would do that very thing! Come on; we'll go in together." And together they scrambled over the heap of earth and rock, finding beyond it a measurably unobstructed passage leading on to an unknown distance in the heart of the mountain.

As it chanced, they were not constrained to explore the gloomy cavern to its farthest depths. Less than fifty yards beyond the obstructing roof fall, Barrett, who was sweeping the jagged walls on either hand with the beam of the flash light as they went along, turned the light of the torch into a narrow niche on the right. At the

back of the niche, which was nothing more than a crevice, shot out in a softer stratum of the rock by one of the tunnel blasts, stood a black painted powder canister partly covered by a gunny sack.

Barrett gave the torch to his companion and fished the canister out of its hiding place. By its weight he could tell that it was filled — with something; not powder, because it wasn't heavy enough for that.

His hands were shaking as if he had been suddenly stricken with an ague when he put the black can down on the tunnel floor. The top had been cleanly cut around the edge, though not quite all of the way around, and it was wired in place. The wire was stiff, but he knelt and twisted at it with bare fingers until it came off. When the cut cover was lifted, one glance at the contents of the can was enough. The powder container was stuffed full of packages of bank notes.

"Oh! Thank Heaven!" gasped the pretty torch holder, and the exclamation was more than half a sob.

"It's here—some of it, at any rate," said Barrett, bank trained coolness taking possession of him at sight of the money. "Will you hold the light down while I count it?"

"C-count it!" she said, with a little shriek. "Why, it will take *hours* to count it—and those men may be here any minute!"

"Oh, no; it won't take seconds," Barrett returned, dumping the packages of bills on the floor and handling them swiftly. Thirty nine of the forty parcels were intact, with the printed "$5,000" binding slip of the bank on each. But the fortieth had been broken and rewrapped with a string; and this one was five hundred dollars short.

"This is the one they broke to give me five hundred dollars that I couldn't spend," he said, and was beginning to cram the money back into the can when Della protested shrilly.

"You can't carry that thing!" she pointed out. "Put it in the gunny sack, and for pity's sake, *hurry!*"

The little tremolo of panic in her voice made Barrett stop and look up at her in amazement. Hitherto she had been all cold courage, and he had been the one to need bolstering. But now they seemed to be changing places.

She was trembling with impatience to be gone, while he found himself growing stubbornly unwilling to hurry; more than unwilling—not wishing to go at all until he had staged a final climaxing act with the men who had not only robbed him, but had concocted a devilish plot to steal his good name and send him to rot in prison. Was he to be satisfied with a simple recovery of the loot and let these scoundrels go free? Hardly.

"All right," he said in reply to her plea for haste, "we'll get out in the open if you'd rather; though if there were any place in here where I could hide you out of bullet range, I'd just as soon settle with those beggars here as anywhere." And he began to chuck the packages of money into the sack.

"What do you mean, 'settle'?" she chittered. "Haven't we got what we came for —if we can only be l-lucky enough to get away with it."

"I mean just what I say," he returned doggedly. "The game isn't played out yet, and it won't be until after I've had my innings."

"Bu-but this isn't red blood, Jimmie, dear!" she wailed; "it's just c-crazy sus-suicide!"

"That, dear girl, is what I'm going to try to make these fellows think it is before I'm through with them. Let's go. Stick closely behind me and snap that light off as soon as you can find your way without it."

Against all the probabilities, they escaped from the tunnel without being intercepted, although the margin of safety was measurable in seconds. They could hear voices on the other side of the cabin, and they had barely time to draw aside in the shadow of the trees when the three men came around the corner of the shack.

The fat man was in the lead, lighting the way with an electric torch, and the smallest of the three, the one they had seen going down the road toward the stalled automobile, was explaining volubly.

"How t' hell was I goin' to know 'at I couldn't trail the geezer?" he snarled. "You said I wasn't to let him know anybody was keepin' cases on him. I've tramped more 'n a hundred miles since he broke loose, tryin' to find out where he'd gone to!"

"Shut up!" snapped the big man in advance. "You've balled it—that's all. You can talk 'til hell freezes over, but that's what it comes to."

Quite methodically Barrett drew his revolver from its holster and aimed it at the leading man. It was only his ineptness with the weapon that gave the bride of a day time to throw herself upon him before he could pull the trigger; and by the time the silent little struggle was ended, the three men had disappeared in the tunnel.

"Oh, good Heavens, Jimmie, dear!" she panted, "have you lost your mind? Let's run! We can reach our car before they overtake us! Come, quick, before they come back and find out what's been done to them!"

"You may go," he gritted. "I want you to go—and take this sack of stuff along with you. But when I go, these bandits go with me—dead or alive."

"Oh, you glorious fool!" she wept, throwing her arms around his neck. "Are you going to make a widow of me before we've been married a day? You can't fight three of them. They'll kill you, and then what will become of me?"

A faint glow of the returning flashlight was beginning to show in the depths of the tunnel, and Barrett freed himself masterfully and thrust the sack of money upon her.

"Take it and fly," he commanded brusquely. "Run on down to the car and I'll be with you when the show is over. I'm not going back to Copah empty-handed. *Run*, I tell you—while you have a chance! The bullets will be flying here in a second or two, and whatever happens, that money's got to be saved!"

"Oh, don't send me away!" she begged. "If you've got to stay, let me stay and f-fight with you!"

"Never in this world. This is a man's job. If you love me, take that sack and run with it!"

Thus adjured, she snatched up the sack and ran—a little way. As she reached the corner of the log cabin she saw the big touring car standing before the door. It had been turned around and was headed for the flight down the mountain. Her first impulse was to drop the sack of money and try to disable the car, thus making pursuit with it impossible if Barrett should come to his senses and run while there was yet time for flight.

But time was no more. Even as the thought flashed into her mind, the three men came stumbling out of the tunnel; two of them accusing the third and cursing him savagely.

"You damned coyote"—it was the harsh voice of the touring car driver that was ripping sawlike into the high mountain silence—"d'you think f'r a holy minute you can double cross us like this and get away with it? Drop that gat 'r I'll bore you right where you stand! Now you've got 'til I can count ten to tell us what you've done with the swag! One—two—three—"

The interruption was a sharp command of "Hands up!" from the tree shadows, and the counting stopped abruptly. According to the time honored custom firmly established by the scenario writers and armchair annalists of wild Western moments of stress, the three men should have reached for the stars in prompt capitulation.

But they did nothing of the sort. Instead, two of them opened fire instantly upon the tree shadows, while the third stooped to grope for the gun he had just dropped at the threatening command of his accuser.

It was all over in a minute. The banging fusillade was answered by spiteful spurts of fire from the tree covert; one of the three—the one who had stooped and was rising to get into action—staggered and sank back to his knees; and the next instant the other two had darted back to cover in the tunnel, dragging the wounded man with them.

After that, silence, profound and unbroken even by the whispering of the night wind

in the pines, descended like a thick cloud upon the scene of the late crackling of fire-arms.

CHAPTER XIII.

GREASE PAINT.

FOR the young woman crouching at the corner of the log cabin the blank silence was horrifying. Quite naturally, her first thought was that Barrett had been killed, and for an instant the cabin and its surroundings swam in dizzy circles for her. But the lapse of self-control was only momentary.

Dropping the sack of bank notes she flew across the little clearing to the shelter of the trees, calling softly: "Jimmie! Oh, Jimmie, dear, where are you?"

Barrett was not dead. When she found him he was sitting on the ground behind one of the larger trees, trying to bandage a flesh wound in his left arm with strips torn from a shirt sleeve.

"Oh, my dear!" she gasped, kneeling beside him. "Have they killed you?"

"Not yet," he returned grimly. "It's only a scratch, but I thought I'd better tie it up. The blood makes everything so messy and sticky."

It was she who did the bandaging, deft fingers flying swiftly.

"It was so perfectly reckless!" she murmured. "Didn't you *know* they'd begin to shoot as soon as you called to them?"

"I supposed they would—yes. But I had cover of a sort and they were in the open. And because they hadn't sense enough to duck I got one of them. Did you see him drop? I'll get the others before I'm through with them. What have you done with the money? And why didn't you go on down to the car as I asked you to?"

"And leave you here to be killed? I couldn't go. You knew I wouldn't go without you."

"But the money," Barrett insisted.

"Oh, it's over there by the cabin. It won't run away until we run with it. And that is what we are going to do, as soon as I get this arm tied up."

"Not me," Barrett denied, resolutely disregardful of his English in his new character. "'Dead or alive,' I said. I'm going to get all three of these sham bad men before I quit. If they get out of that tunnel alive they'll come with their hands up. Is that their car out in front of the cabin?"

"It is. I was just wondering if I couldn't disable it some way when the shooting began."

"We mustn't cripple that car. By the time I'm through with these buccaneers we're going to need it—either for an ambulance or a hearse."

"For mercy's sake!" she breathed. "And daddy said—"

"I know what your father has said," Barrett broke in. "I suppose I might have gone along indefinitely, giving all the scraps and street rows a wide berth and cosseting myself like a sick lamb. But that's a back number now. I'm getting my teeth into the real thing, and by George, it tastes good to me!"

"But, Jimmie, dear!" she pleaded. "You can't get them out of that tunnel unless they come of their own accord! And when they find out there is only one of you—"

"They are going to find out at that same moment that the one is a whaling plenty," he boasted belligerently. "Hand me that coat and let me get some more cartridges out of the pocket."

"*Jimmie!* Do you want to break my heart? You're not going into that black hole to get killed!"

"Sure I'm not. It's the other fellows who are going to get killed if they won't listen to reason. I've told you what's due to happen. They're going to Copah with us—dead or alive. It's up to them to decide which way they prefer to go. I'm not particular."

"Oh, you glorious, *glorious* fool!" she exclaimed rapturously. "I—I'd give worlds if daddy could see you now!"

"I'm not exactly on exhibition," he snorted; "but neither am I any longer a monkey on a stick. Hold my coat for me and stay right here behind this tree. I'm going in after those make believe brigands."

It was all to no purpose that she begged and pleaded again, trying to show him that

he had done all that any one man could be expected to do; that they could disable the robbers' car and reach their own in safety with the money if they should go at once.

"It's no manner of use, Della, dear," he said when she stopped for lack of breath. "I wouldn't back down now if the whole financial system of the universe depended upon it. It's all or nothing: I want those beggars in that hole and I'm going to get 'em."

Of course, she had to let him go. She wasn't quite the kind of young thing to wrap her arms around him and try to hold him. Hovering behind the sheltering tree bole, she saw him slip out and dart across the moonlit space.

At the tunnel mouth he disappeared, and there was an agonizing interval before anything else happened. But by the time anxiety and the prolonged suspense were threatening to drive her mad a curious monster that seemed to be chiefly legs and arms attached to a single body came tumbling out of the tunnel's mouth to roll and wallow in strange and grotesque contortions all over the small open spaces between the hill slope and the cabin, emitting savage curses in two separate and distinct voices, the maledictions mingling with thudding blows, as it leaped and floundered.

It was the Barrett half of the monster that disentangled itself and rose up after the wallowings were quieted, and he was brandishing the revolver with which he had clubbed his big bodied antagonist.

"One!" he shouted triumphantly at the tree shadows and promptly dived back into the tunnel.

This time the bride of a day heard muffled shots, three or four of them, and stopped her ears in wifely terror. But after another interval which seemed doubly age long, a single figure appeared at the tunnel portal. It was leaning far forward, trudging manfully and dragging two other figures, both limp and unresisting.

"I told you I'd get 'em!" Barrett panted as she ran out. "They may not all live to get to Copah—I'm not so sure about that part of it—but they're going there just the same!"

"But you?" she faltered. "You're all bloody! Where are you hurt?"

"It's nothing; I got a crack over the head in that last tussle, that's all. But you'll notice that I've made the riffle. I said I would and I did. Run and get the blankets out of the cabin and we'll truss these birds up."

"I—I don't think I knew you at all before to-night, Jimmie, dear," she stammered; and then she fled to do his bidding.

As it transpired in the trussing process, Barrett had made a thorough job of it with his clubbed revolver, and there were only relaxed and sodden bodies to work upon as he bound his captives with their own belts, the tow rope and even the tire chains, after having made a rude first aid dressing for the small man who had been shot in the leg in the first exchange.

"I hope I haven't killed any of 'em," he said when the trussing was completed, adding vindictively: "I want to see 'em sent where they were meaning to send me, by Jove!" Then, in victorious gloating: "Wasn't it a lovely scrap? But I'm forgetting—you didn't see much of it."

"I s-saw you when you stood up and shouted 'One'!"

"That was the cheddar cheese hog. He was just inside of the tunnel, trying to peek out, and I stumbled over him first. Got his gun and a grip on his gullet before he could shoot or yell for help. He didn't last long—too fat."

"And these others?"

"They were easy. They were over behind the fallen roof and this little one was already crippled. The black whiskered bird emptied his gun at me, but he was rattled and couldn't shoot straight. Guess he thought I was ten or a dozen instead of just one man. He clubbed me once before I laid him out. Can you back that car of theirs around here where it will be handy?"

"I'm as nervous as a s-scared cat, but I'll try," she assented, and went to do it.

With the big touring car backed into position, the next problem was how to get the three unconscious captives into it. Barrett solved the problem by tearing the cabin bunk bedstead to pieces and laying the planks as an inclined plane up which they

slid and rolled the human lading. The fat man gave them the most trouble, but by dint of a lot of pulling and pushing and prying with the planks, they got the inert mass of him up into the tonneau, after a time.

"There!" said Barrett, slamming the tonneau door upon the disorderly heap of humanity tumbled in without regard to riding ease or even tolerable comfort. "Now let's see if you'll poison anybody else's coffee!" Then to the bride of a day: "Look me in the eye, Della, girl: Am I, or am I not, red blooded enough to come up to your father's idea of the kind of man he wants for a son-in-law?"

"You—you've got me all fuddled up and dazed, Jimmie, dear," she stammered. "You—you're so different! What did it?"

He laughed. "It's the reaction from the monkey-on-a-stick part you made me play in the hotel. Did you think you were marrying something less than a man? Let's go. It's a long way back to Copah."

With the money sack salvaged, Barrett kicked the slats off the pigeon coop so that the birds could escape, and then, climbing to the driving seat of the touring car he took the wheel and the descent of the mountain was begun. When they came to the curve in the road, where the roadster had been left, he stopped the car and got out.

"You've had excitement and hard work enough for one night," he told Della, "and I'm not going to let you drive that car to town. I'll slack the brake and let it run back into the ditch, and we'll send somebody out here after it to-morrow. Keep your gun handy and pull it down on those fellows in the tonneau if they wake up while I'm gone. This boat is an ambulance, now, but we won't mind turning it into an undertaker's wagon if they insist upon it."

Suiting the action to the word, he climbed into the roadster and let it run backward until there was room to pass. Once more in his place behind the wheel of the touring car, he issued his final order.

"Now you cuddle down and go to sleep, if you can. I can find the way back to town with this truck load of stunned hogs, and there isn't a thing you can do if you try to stay awake. This isn't just my idea of a wedding tour—hasn't been, from the first—but we'll make it serve. Kiss me just once, dear, in honor of the occasion, and—"

When she sat up, he saw by the light of the dash lamp that she was wiping her lips.

"What was it—blood?" he asked, as he let the big car go racing down the grades.

"No; grease paint," she said; and with that she snuggled down beside him and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHEDDAR CHEESE.

IN the graying dawn of a flawless June morning, early risers in the thriving little mining city of Copah saw a seven-passenger automobile, red from radiator to rear tank with the dust of the desert, limping on an inadequate number of cylinders up the hill street leading from the railway yards.

In the driving seat sat a young man, hatless and hollow eyed, with a caking of the red dust in his matted hair, and beside him was a young woman asleep, with her head on the chauffeur's shoulder, her face and natty suit of sport clothes also covered with the red dust, and her cowboy hat rakishly cocked over one eye.

In the roomy tonneau was a lading at which the early morning onlookers stared in astonishment. Crouched on the floor of the car, with the rear seat for a back rest, were three men in various stages of dishevelment; a fat man with a blond mustache; a dark faced man, bearded, blood stained and angry eyed; and a third, smaller than either of the others, whose face was a harsh mask of pain.

It was at the main entrance of the Hotel Intermountain that the dusty automobile drew up. Very gently the haggard chauffeur awakened his seatmate, while a little knot of early pedestrians gathered to stare at the singular spectacle afforded by the travel worn car and its strange occupants. Through the revolving doors of the hotel came a detachment of bellboys intent upon

tips; and at sight of the gathering crowd a policeman sauntered up.

"What the divvle will it be?" queried a railroad yardman on his way to work, asking of the nearest ear.

"Movie outfit, I guess; been out in the desert shootin' a film for a hold-up," was the answer. "Yuh can seen the grease paint on that feller's face, and the stuff that's made to look like blood—never stopped to wash it off. And look at the skirt: ain't she a peach—dirt and all?"

The hatless driver of the dusty car was clambering out stiffly, dragging a half-filled gunny sack after him. A nearer view showed that his "make-up" was faultless; almost corpse like.

One of the bystanders whispered to another: "By George, if that isn't blood on his face and in his hair, I'll eat my hat! Why, look; you can see the cut and the swelling! Them movie stunters don't stop at nothing, do they?"

By this time the chauffeur was helping the young woman out of the car, and it was noticed that he stood with one foot on the half-filled gunny sack while he did it. As the sauntering policeman, accepting the moving picture explanation of the scene as the true one, was moving away, the young man who had failed to remove his "make-up" beckoned to him.

"Officer, can you drive a car?" he asked quite casually.

"And if I can—what then?" demanded the majesty of the law.

"I was going to say that you might drive this car around to headquarters and have these three birds in the tonneau locked up for safekeeping."

"Say; ain't you movie actors?"

The young man shook his head. "Only in the sense that we've been on the move the better part of the night—out across the Red Desert and back."

Shouldering his way through the throng that was now blocking the sidewalk, the big policeman looked in upon the tonneau lading. "Hell's bells!" he said; "so *that's* why they ain't sittin' on th' seat! Who done th' job o' hog-tyin'?"

"I did," replied the chief actor modestly; then, apologizing for the manner: "It's not a very workmanlike job, I'll admit. I had nothing but substitutes for handcuffs and shackles, and I had to make up in quantity what the stuff lacked in quality. If you'll take these men to headquarters and have them doctored up and jailed, I'll appear a little later and make the charge against them."

While he was speaking, the smallish man whose name on the hotel register was Simmons, had wriggled up to lay a hand on the chief actor's shoulder.

"Oh, no; you don't make any such grand stand play as that, Mr. James Baxter Barrett," he said quietly. "I'm on to you with both feet, this time. You are arrested for the theft of two hundred thousand dollars from your own bank. And we're going to make your wife—if she is your wife—an accessory after the fact. You may as well come clean. What have you done with that money?"

Before the accused one could reply, an elderly man, grizzled, gray, and with a granite like face and the underslung jaw of a ring fighter, had come through the revolving doors to push his way to the curb. At sight of him, the young woman, poised on the running board of the automobile, leaped into his arms with a cry of "Daddy!"

Barrett was grinning into the face of the smallish man, and if the grin could have been caught on a motion picture film it would have made his fortune.

"You are just a few hours too late, Mr. Simmons," he countered. "If you had arrested me last night when you came to my room and let me tangle you up on the geography of Chattanooga, you would have stood a good chance of fingering the big reward. I hadn't any alibi then, but I have one now."

"Where is it?" was the snappy demand.

"Right here," Barrett returned, picking up the dusty gunny sack. "One hundred and ninety-nine thousand five hundred of them, in fact. You see, Mrs. Barrett and I had the clew — the real clew — and we were obliged to pull off the little theatrical stunt on you to keep you from jailing me before we could get action.

"Now, good people," he went on, plead-

ing with the sidewalk jam, "if you'll be good enough to let us through—there are two of us needing a hot bath and breakfast worse than a stray pup ever needed a bone."

A couple of hours later, at a table for three in the Intermountain dining room, Barrett, bathed, shaved, clothed, and in his right mind, was sitting opposite a bright faced young woman whose dark eyes were dancing. Between them, at the table end, sat the grizzled elderly man with the underslung jaw, methodically putting away his breakfast as he listened to his daughter's story of the adventures of the night.

"What did you think when you came back and found that I was married, Daddykins?" the young woman asked, after the adventures had been duly spread forth.

"Huh!" growled the mine owner father, "you didn't fool me for a single minute. Hogan met me at the train and told me you'd married a stranger from Tennessee; and I told him he lied. You see, I knew it was Jimmie you'd married, and not anybody else under the shining heavens."

"Of course you did. But did you really believe that Jimmie had stolen two hundred thousand dollars from his own bank?"

The elderly man looked up from beneath his shaggy eyebrows at the two younglings, first at one and then at the other.

"I'll leave it to you both!" he exclaimed, "if it didn't look that way. How was anybody going to believe anything else?"

"You were entirely justified," said Barrett equably. "It was up to me to prove that I didn't. But I should never have been able to do it if Della hadn't jumped in and helped. It was her good work and wit that kept me going. At the very last, when we were chasing those fellows out of town, I wanted to turn back. I thought we were on the wrong trail. But Della wouldn't have it that way; and her hunch was better than my logic."

"Humph!" grunted the methodical breakfast eater. "What gets me is what came afterward. If anybody'd asked me a week ago if my soon-to-be son-in-law would go out in the woods and pick him three professional thugs and gunfighters, single-handed, and bring 'em in all mussed up and hogtied in their own equipment—"

Barrett laughed. "Your soon-to-be son-in-law might not have been equal to it; I doubt very much if he would. But, you see, a married man has certain responsibilities that can't be shirked. After my wife had led me right up to the jumping-off place, what else was there for me to do? Just think; if I had crawfished then what a life Della might have led me all the way down through the years!"

A grim smile flitted across the granite face of the elderly man.

"The way she tells it, it looks like she tried her prettiest to *make* you crawfish—and you wouldn't. You didn't need to make the fight. You had the money and could have got away with it."

"Oh, well," said Barrett, half embarrassed; "those fellows had it framed up to send me to the pen and I thought it was only fair to give them the same chance they were trying to give me."

"I don't suppose Jimmie ever will admit that he didn't do it just for fun," the young wife broke in. "But if you ever say again that he isn't red-blooded—"

The grizzled fighter of many rude battles of the mining camps grunted his disclaimer.

"I shan't," he agreed. "I ain't aimin' to get myself all tore up and gouged and bit at my time o' life. But, say, Della, baby; it sure does do me a heap o' good to know that you've got you a he-man after all, when it did look so cussedly unlikely a while back. And you can bet on one thing: if them plug-ugly miners up at the 'Little Della' ever get on the rampage again and go to shootin' up the camp I'm going to telegraph for Jimmie to come and put 'em all to bed—I sure am!"

"Well," said Barrett calmly, "I don't know but I might try it. Nothing like keeping your hand in, once you've got it in, you know."

Whereat the young wife laughed and clapped her hands.

"He's called your bluff, daddy!" she crowed. "But please don't wire him until after he has had a little target practice with a six-gun."

A bell-hop came in with a telegram.

"Here is swift action," Barrett commented as he read the typewritten sheet damp from the copying rolls. "I wired President Hawley as soon as we got in and here is his reply:

"Wire received. Congratulations. Discount all newspaper stories. Nobody here believed you had gone wrong. It was a frame-up, and we have found the stool-pigeon here in the bank. Take a month for your wedding trip instead of two weeks. Respects and all good wishes to Mrs. Barrett. Instructions wired to First National of Copah as to disposition of recovered money. All happiness to you both."

"Fine!" growled the mine owner; and then as the waiter brought covered dishes of hot waffles for two and a piece of apple pie for Barrett: "What's that—pie for breakfast?"

"My mother was a New England woman and I was brought up on pie for breakfast," Barrett explained. Then to the waiter, with a drooping of an eyelid for the young woman opposite: "Please bring me some cheddar cheese; c-h-e-d-d-a-r, cheddar."

And that solemn-faced waiter, mumbling deferentially, "Right, sir," could not understand why the exceedingly pretty young woman sitting across the table from the cheese orderer, suddenly covered her face with her napkin and burst into tears—or laughter; he couldn't decide which.

THE END

THE BUYER

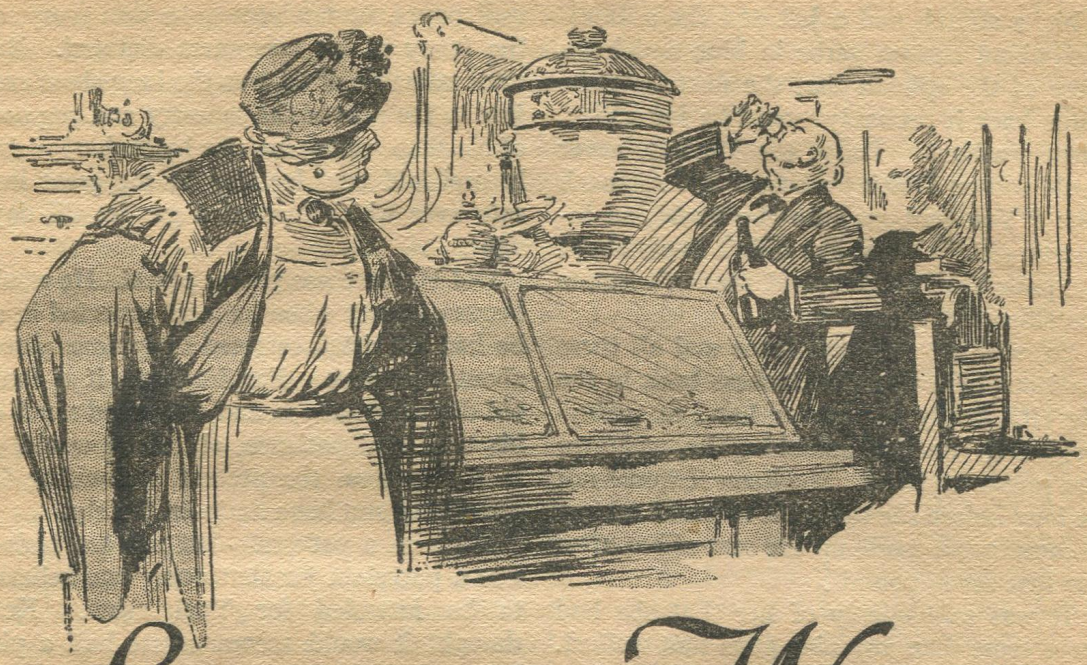
EAGER, she stood in the mart of Life,
The coin of Youth in her hand;
Wonderful were the wares spread out,
So beautiful and grand.
And as she stood, a crowd surged round:
"Take whate'er you wish," said one,
"For with Youth's money you can buy
Most things under the sun."

"Look, there is Wealth and Fame," said he,
And another said, "There's Love,
And Happiness, which every maid
Is always dreaming of."
Then up spoke one who was old and wise:
"Remember this," explained he,
"With every purchase, Life is sure
To toss in something free."

'Twas hard to choose from amongst them all.
Love looked most fair to her eyes,
Then some one said, "If you choose Love
You'll draw Pain for a prize."
Still, as with hand outstretched for Love,
She caught the glitter of Fame.
The coin fell in the palm of Life,
Her heart with hope aflame.

But when she looked for the prize, which hers
Most assuredly should have been,
Alas! she found that Discontent
Was what Life had thrown in.
Back over the road with trembling steps,
A seeker of Love, she went,
Only to find she was too late—
Her gold had all been spent!

Ida M. Thomas.



Liquor and Woman

By ROLAND KREBS

ALL over Mrs. Charlotte Gibbs was that motherly air. She appeared to be dressed in it. One looked at her once and knew instantly that she had an immense heart that was still not done with growing.

There was her gray, nearly white, hair that lent such a soft tone to her features. Her eyes, too, were gray and soft. They pleaded with the world always to be good. The gentle, pliable mouth was ready ever to relax into a warm smile.

This motherly old soul dressed smartly, but not garishly, in things that gave her a trimness and somehow seemed to command respect from saleswomen, trolley conductors and messenger boys. In a word, Mrs. Charlotte Gibbs always had the demeanor of an important delegate just about to go before the State Convention of Parent-Teacher Associations and propose a resolution under which the wife and daughters of a burglar would find no social barriers down to them.

Yet, with all this virtue fairly dripping from her, Mrs. Charlotte Gibbs was the kind of person who, after being acquainted with one only a short time led one to remark: "Appearances are often deceiving." You see, she had one really big fault. She just would steal.

In fact, McShea, of the Bertillon department, used to say that the dawn stealing over the hilltops and the rivers stealing down toward the sea really shirked when compared with the stealing Mrs. Gibbs performed with one hand.

In her forty years of activity Mrs. Gibbs, fondly called "The Duchess" by her pals and her foes, the dicks, had tried nearly every racket that honest people fight shy of. When she looked a desk sergeant in the mustache it was problematical whether he would book her for scratching, poke snatching, the badger game, shoving the queer or gluing herself to some one's bundle without asking his permission.

For the error of her way she had served

a bit, a stretch and a jolt and the authorities whom custom garbs in blue and brass were of the opinion that the next time she came back it probably would be for a long, drear washout. Truly, the Duchess never could sob on Destiny's bosom and reproach her: "You sent me into the world, an innocent girl." What she didn't know about the path that was crooked wouldn't inflate the skin of a gooseberry.

So, with all this experience and all these instincts, here was the Duchess back in the big city, ready to try her hand at pennyweighting, keester snatching or whatever else presented itself. She knew it would not be long before she did a bit of profit taking, because nerve made up the rest of her after the first seven pounds.

It was said openly of her that she had more crust than any nine guns that walked. The pinches she had talked herself out of by pure nerve would have stretched no doubt, if placed end to end, from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to What Cheer, Iowa. Everything she did was done with her nerve. If, for example, the Duchess wanted to let you down for a fifty dollar loan, she didn't say it in so many words, but she left you with the impression that the National City Bank would melt down the brass in its doorknobs to raise money for her.

Yes, indeed, she was made of nerve.

II.

In busy One Hundred and Tenth Street, on the south side, was the shop that was conducted by Herbert Kern, kind, good, old and alcoholic. It was a—well, just what sort of a shop would you call it? It wasn't a jewelry store, although he had many stones and metals there that were nearly priceless. Nor was it a furniture place, although if one wished for a walnut secretary of ancient manufacture it was almost certain to be in old Herbert's store. He just sort of dabbled in expensive things, including prohibition liquor, and made more than a decent living by his trade with a clientele that was spreading well over the smarter north side.

He had rare pictures—big things that happily hid blemishes in the dining room wall paper, or miniatures on thin ivory, as the fancy of his customers dictated. But most valuable of all was the long show case just to the rear of the tapestry and rug part of his shop, whose interior he drained nightly and laid tray by tray in the great iron safe over which burned a gas jet till daylight.

Old Herbert was philosophical. He would become thirsty when he least expected it, so he had his drink secreted in various places about the store. For instance, if a fussy old dowager came in and consumed much of his time and patience, old Kern would go to the safe on the pretext of hunting for something and have a nip on the sly.

High on a pedestal—but not too high—was a porcelain jar that every one believed to be intended for Yogi ashes. Kern thought it would accommodate half a pint better than the remains of an Oriental. It did. Splendidly. Why, he could be in any part of his establishment—any part, mind you—and never be more than ten feet from a shot.

Still he was not a hopeless drunkard by any means. He just relished being lubricated every so often and seldom was more than just "happy." That goes two ways, especially when it is considered that he had been left a widower five years before.

Compared to Mrs. Kern, Mrs. Rip Van Winkle was a sweet, even tempered wife who had little to say often. Old Herbert's wife had harped on his drinking night and day all of the thirty years they had been married. She talked about it everlastingly.

So now Kern took his nip in peace and quiet. With the peace and quiet had come a fair amount of prosperity so that he was able to save quite a bit besides adding to his wares from time to time.

On the south side was a bootlegger who had a route and made his deliveries much like a more moral milkman. He tipped Kern off that if the shopkeeper were in the market for a little jumping jack, it could be had for two thousand dollars—an entire barrel of it, seven years old and fresh from a bonded warehouse.

Old Herbert said he would think it over. While he was thinking it over and reflecting that a barrel would give a cheery glow

to the dark basement under the store for at least two years, in walked the representative of an insurance company. He talked life insurance until he got a whiff of old Kern's breath, then switched to fire risks and finally burglary protection.

When the insurance man finished his song and dance, he had shown the shopkeeper that two thousand dollars paid in at once would make him independently rich should burglars clean him out some evening in the near future. Herbert Kern said he would think it over. He did, drumming on the surface of his boiled white shirt and tugging first at his collar wings, then at his white mustache ends. After a little thinking—not too much—he passed up the insurance and ordered the barrel.

Such a simpleton was old Herbert Kern, with a heart as big as the moon and a thirst as big as the moon's orbit.

III.

MRS. CHARLOTTE GIBBS was getting the lay of One Hundred and Tenth Street when her eye chanced upon the shop whose window bore the name "H. Kern." It looked aristocratic and expensive to her and she thought it worth while to investigate. The Duchess assumed an expensive appearance herself and went inside and asked to see some cigarette holders.

The first thing she noticed about old Herbert was that his rather unsteady gait and slowly arriving thoughts indicated that he was steamed up to a degree, more or less.

Just between all of us, a person would have had little difficulty in convincing Herbert Kern that he just had been elected governor or that the world grows better day by day. It was late afternoon and the Duchess estimated that by nightfall the shopkeeper would be in that unhappy state which the irreverent denotes as "pie-eyed." Her thoughts shaped themselves quickly. She rather fancied the store and its merchandise. Kern sold her an ebony holder, whose jewels were barely perceptible, yet flashed fire once they were noted. Without a groan she paid its price, figuring that it was an investment that would bring returns.

"Are you open evenings?" asked Mrs. Gibbs.

"Yes, ma'am," said Kern, stooping slightly into a profound bow.

On the way out the Duchess gave one more glance at the formidable safe under its yellow torch and made a mental resolution to squander no golden minutes.

IV.

WHEN alcoholic old Herbert Kern awakened next morning and began to grope his way out of the fogs to sobriety, the sun was on the top rung of its stepladder and he was in a police station cell. To the unsophisticated let it be said that going to sleep happy and awakening with inch-thick bars functioning as Swiss window drapes provides a thrill that cannot be withstood very often.

Kern did just what one is expected to do under the circumstances. He went to the door and shouted: "Hello!"

"Hello, yourself!" answered the turnkey, appearing from the corridor. "What do you want?"

"What am I in for?" Herbert asked.

"Oh, just to sober up. Come on, I'll take you out to the desk sergeant and he'll return your stuff to you."

In much of a daze Kern confronted the important blotter sergeant, who rather suspected that his abilities would find a better field for expression were he chief of detectives. What sergeant doesn't?

"Did I get into a jam or something?" the culprit asked.

"No, no," said the sergeant casually, taking a brier pipe, five matches, a tobacco pouch, cuff links, watch, tie pin and sixty-five cents from a property envelope and shoving it at Kern. "You were a little oiled up and we locked you up for the night for your own good so you wouldn't get run over or anything like that."

Old Herbert hurried from the police station. He wondered if he or the policemen had forgotten to lock up his establishment. It worried him because there had been no key returned with his other effects.

When he got to his shop his worries began afresh. The key was in the door. With

more haste than his aging bones had been able to corral for years, old Herbert went inside. For a moment he sighed his relief. The big safe was closed. The trays were not in their places in the show case. Then he must have locked up his jewels despite his having had a wee drop too much.

Nervously he opened the safe. Then he nearly collapsed. The trays of jewels were not there. He hurried to the show case to look once more.

The showcase was empty, right enough. The trays were dropped carelessly on the floor, each stripped of the wares that had decorated it. Old Herbert had to take two drinks from the porcelain Yogi jar before he could realize that he had been robbed. So far as he could figure, he was out about eleven thousand four hundred and eighty dollars in gold, silver, platinum and stones.

He hurried back to the police station and once more stood before the desk sergeant.

"Say," he said, "tell me just how it all happened that you caged me up for the night, will you?"

"All right, listen," the policeman answered crisply. "Last night you were lit up like a cathedral. If you had been left to roam around loose you'd have walked into a street car or eaten a peck of marbles—something like that. Your wife asked us to put you in the clink for safekeeping over night. That's all there is to that."

The sergeant considered the incident closed. He again picked up his newspaper.

"My wife," gasped old Herbert. "There must be some mistake."

"She said she was your wife."

"My wife's been dead for five years."

"Well, then, you must have got another one since. Better sober up a little more, old man. This lady sure had your number. She knew your weak spots as well as my wife knows mine."

"What did she look like? What did she say?"

Kern's questions were double barreled.

"Don't you know what your own wife looks like? She was a mighty nice looking lady, if you ask me. Gray hair, nice appearance. I don't see what she sees in you, if you ask me. Anyway, she said she was afraid you'd get hurt, like the last time."

"Like the last time?" old Herbert said. "What last time?"

"Your memory's rotten, isn't it? Your wife said that the last time you were on a toot you left your store unlocked all night and then fell over a park bench and broke a leg. Now are you satisfied?"

"No, I'm not. Who was supposed to have locked the store up last night?"

"Why, your wife attended to that."

"Well, I still contend there is some mistake," insisted Kern. "I haven't any wife. Whoever that was just said she was my wife and that's not all. I was robbed during the night of eleven thousand four hundred dollars worth of jewelry, while I was sitting here in jail 'for safety's sake.'"

The sergeant's hand went to his forehead. He, too, began to think there was some mistake and he had a slight notion as to who had made the mistake. There was nothing to do but take the shopkeeper before the chief of detectives.

Old Herbert, of course, could not identify the person who had robbed him. It was only when the detective chief brought out photographs of Mrs. Charlotte Gibbs, the Duchess, that he recognized a resemblance to the woman who had bought a cigarette holder and, unknown to him, "sized up" his store.

"Yes, that's the dame," the sergeant said. "Gee, I didn't know she was crooked. She sure looked like she might be the wife of a prosperous guy."

"You're good, McShane," the chief of detectives said sarcastically to the policeman. "I never suspected that you'd ever let a crook have a man locked up in the station all night so she could clean his place out undisturbed. Take a good look at that woman. She's the nerviest dame in the United States."

V.

THE results of all this were these:

The sergeant now patrols a beat.

Mrs. Charlotte Gibbs, the Duchess, is living in seclusion off the proceeds of selling Kern's jewelry.

There now is fire, burglar and tornado insurance on the shop and its wares.

Old Herbert Kern doesn't drink a drop.

The Tusk of the Butcher

By PHILIP M. FISHER, JR.

I THINK you will not say to me again that these wild beasts do not think like men think, señor, when I have finished. Nor will you say again that with these wild spirits of the *bosque* all is what you call this instinct, and there is no such thing as love and hate and fear and courage and memory and revenge. Of a certainty, you will not. For to say that would not be of the truth, and it is of true happenings that I speak.

Many years have I lived in Olongapo, and it is not for nothing that I have been guide for the navy folk who work here about your great and marvelous Dewey Dry Dock. Aye, there is not a Negrito in all the reservation who knows the bamboo as do I who am Tagalog from Cavite Province. Not one, *señor*. Do you desire deer meat for your officers' mess, you come to me, and I lead you to the slopes of Cinco Picos, and all your ships have venison. Does your palate itch for chicken, and not five kilos from Gordon's farm will the *muchachos* groan under the weight of a dozen wild cocks. If it is iguana steaks, white and succulent and rich, who but I can lead you to the damp green bottom land where there sit like twisted bits of fallen limbs iguanas by the score, bright eyed, motionless, enjoying the toasting lances of the sun. And if it be *baubui, señor*, ah, then it is that I am king.

And it is of these *baubui, señor*, these wild pigs, that I would tell you now. For of a certainty these *baubui*, above all other beasts of the *bosque*, do think, and do have memories, and do hold hate, and a thirst for revenge.

In particular, there was the great one that all men in the reservation came to know as El Carnicero, which means the butcher, *señor*, in your own tongue. Aye, he was a great one, great in body and spirit; and with the eye of a fiend, the memory of a money lender, and the cunning of a priest of the inquisition. He had a mind, that great one. And not a Negrit' in the province but feared him, and carried a charm against him even as they did against the great pythons that wait for men at river crossings in the dark of night. And

always, on their fishing up the Rio Boton, done at night with the glare of great bundles of burning bamboo making the *bosque* on either side alive with strange shapes of light and shadow, always was there one *muchacho* who carried ready strung an arrow that was not meant for fish, but for El Carnicero, for this devil of a pig, *señor.*

There was one afternoon when I had been invited to drink with the officers at Gordon's farm, that Chief Augustin, of the little Negrit' village up the Rio Boton, brought in one of his sons who had been gored by this El Carnicero. And all listened to the story, and were astonished much when they heard that El Carnicero had departed unharmed after his raid upon the village, although a dozen bowmen had emptied their bamboo quivers of all their arrows. Aye, thus it ever was. The big pig was charmed, it seemed, and in league with all the devils.

And Chief Augustin, who was a brave man, *señor,* although no bigger than a ten year old boy of my own Tagalog folk, wept as he watched Gordon put this iodine on his son's torn leg, and plead with the officers and with me to go out and kill the *baubui* fiend that no arrow could harm.

Now there was one officer stationed at the Navy Yard, *señor,* whom no one called a friend. He was a paymaster, and you who are a naval officer well know that among paymasters there are some whom the handling of money has made so careful in all things that they are even afraid of giving their friendship, lest they lose thereby. He would play poker, of a truth, as the officers were doing this afternoon—but he never lost. Of such a carefulness, aye! close to the belly, *señor,* as I have heard the sailors say. And he would believe nothing that he had not seen with his own eyes.

So it was that he mocked the chief when he wept and cried that El Carnicero was a devil, and that his village was bewitched by him, and must from now on go in fear.

"Bah!" cried this paymaster, whose name was Barlow. "It is only a pig. What manner of men are you that you fear a pig!"

Whereupon Chief Augustin drew himself up, and his little black eyes became like an iguana's in the sun, glittering black diamonds. And he turned his back, and said nothing. And all of us were sorry for him, and had sympathy with his trouble. And Lieutenant Douglas, from one of the destroyers, dropped his cards, and smiled.

"Why don't you take a try at this pig, yourself, Pay?" he suggested, with a softness in his voice that made me feel glad. "I'll give you a rifle and ammunition from the ship."

This last was a mean thing to say, because it suggested that the hunt would cost the paymaster nothing. And it hit home, and this man Barlow flushed.

"By Heaven, I will!" he cried.

And my heart jumped, for I had done no hunting for a week and was afraid of going stale.

"I will guide you," I said.

The paymaster frowned at this. Therefore, because I respected the chief and had a great sympathy for his trouble I added:

"My services will cost nothing, paymaster. But a few cartridges—"

The paymaster looked at Lieutenant Douglas with a question in his eye. And the lieutenant nodded quickly.

"I'll furnish his, too," he said.

And the paymaster scowled; but during the game we made our plans.

II.

Now this El Carnicero, *señor,* as I have said, had for many years been comrade of the devil. And truly had he earned his reputation; and truly, too, did he sustain that reputation in the days that followed the paymaster's decision to hunt him down. Aye, I was witness myself to the first encounter between that paymaster and this evil *baubui!* And of a truth was it ill omened.

The *buen Dios* sees all things, the priests have often enough told us. And His is the vengeance upon those men, and those beasts as well, who do not heed all His commands. That I may say now, too; for as I said before, was I not witness to the first encounter between those two creations of the evil one?

That paymaster showed himself a man who was not a man, but a thing without

compassion or virtue, and this at the very start, even before the beginning of the actual hunt.

He did not once show sympathy for the Negrit' lad who lay on the bamboo couch close to us, groaning with the pain caused by the terrible gashing blow of El Carnicero's great tusk. Lieutenant Douglas three times left his cards, though he was losing much *dinero*, to give the little fellow cold drink, and lay a hand upon the forehead that was damp and cold with the sweat of pain. And each time that he did this, that paymaster would argue.

"Let the blackie alone, Douglas," he would say. "Damn it, can't we have a little game here without this cursed interruption!"

There was no use answering such a man.

So it was that on the Friday afternoon that came next, the steam launch took me out to the destroyer on which the paymaster had his duty; and from there we, this Barlow and I, took rifles and made a landing at the coal dock across the bay. From this place we took the trail that led over the hill, and through the mangrove swamp, to the bamboo.

I could see by his eye that the paymaster did not know our Philippine *bosque*, but I felt, too, that nevertheless he was a man not unaccustomed to the hunt. He carried his rifle in such a way, *señor*, and his feet trod so lightly over the dry leaves and broken bamboo that crackled so loudly if stepped upon. And his eyes were swift to see all movements or strange bits of color.

I wondered if the man could shoot the rifle he balanced in the crook of his arm. A paymaster is not a fighting man of the navy, as you well know, unless it be in arguing over his pay checks and his accounts with the food contractors ashore. But, ha! He took the lead over the trail, and suddenly became a motionless statue. I, also, froze.

Then slowly I saw his hand creep back in my direction, and his finger beckon, s-l-o-w-l-y. And as is my custom, I moved to his side without sound, and almost, it would seem without a step. It is not for nothing, *señor*, that I have the reputation that is known all over Luzon. And my eyes were alert, and I sought for some bit of color in the brown and green of the bamboo that would mean a living creature.

But I could see nothing, until the paymaster nodded to his left hand, and whispered in my ear.

"What is that?"

And then it was that I made out a point of red behind a tangled root clump perhaps fifty steps away. At once I knew what manner of thing it was, and silently I called myself *un ciego*, a blind man, that I had let the paymaster see this first.

"A wild chicken, *señor*," I said.

"Will it frighten the tusker if I shoot him?" whispered this Barlow.

"We are many kilos from where the pigs lie, *señor*," I replied, and truly we were, though had I expected to see one beyond the next turn in the trail I would have bade him shoot, for my curiosity was great. And also it is well to know how the man with whom one hunts can handle his rifle. There are times when life depends upon one's companions, and this El Carnicero was not a pig that was *cobarde*, but one who would charge an elephant, *señor*.

"Besides," I continued, "we can use that *gallo* for supper to-night. Shoot, but it is a long shot, and a chicken not a great target."

Slowly he raised his rifle, but it had hardly come to level when the shot rang out. The red point disappeared; yet as we ran to the spot where it had been there was a rustling of dry leaves, and when we arrived, there was a hotly colored wild cock, dead, with the bullet hole through the lower part of his neck, near the crop, *señor*.

The paymaster did not even smile as he turned the *gallo* over with his gun.

"Bring it along, and pluck the feathers as you go," he ordered harshly, and turned back to the trail.

I felt the blood rush to my head, *señor*, as he said these words, for I was not servant, being well born in my province. And besides, my services were to cost the paymaster not a single *peso*, and that he well knew, it being the condition on which I hunted with him. But I did not like his manner to me, nor the tone of command in what he said.

Then I shrugged my shoulder, and to myself smiled.

"What does it matter," I muttered, as I picked up the chicken. "From a man I should feel hurt, but this Barlow is not a man. Yet, aya, *gracias a Dios*, he can shoot! It is well. Let El Carnicero beware!"

It was not a kilo more, *señor*, when we descended from the hot dry hill bamboo to the low land that followed the Rio Boton. And how green and cool it was there after our sweating in the afternoon sun. Beneath was the earth damp and soft to the foot. Above the branches of the tall trees met and formed a green mat through which the sun could not penetrate. All about us everything was green, and the light itself was of the same color, and the green air smelled good, and cooled the throat and lungs. Monkeys swung above us, following our way, and chattering in their great curiosity over what we might be and what we were about to do.

The paymaster did not like this. And he cursed them for the noise they made.

"They'll tell everything within ten miles that we're coming," he snarled. "I'll kill a couple of them to teach them a lesson. Why can't they let us hunt in peace. Like those damn Negrit's back at Gordon's. Curse them."

And he raised his rifle.

But I bade him stop a minute.

"It is bad luck to kill a monkey, *señor*, when we are on the hunt for pig. Let them go. They tell nothing. They are always talking and fighting together, and no creature takes fright at the chatter."

He glared at me, his rifle still raised toward the green roof of the *bosque*.

"What the hell difference does a monkey or two matter?" he snarled again. "By Heaven, they even look like those cursed Negrit's too. And I only broke even in that game, when that infernal fool Chief Augustin, or whatever they call him, butted in with his bleeding brat. Stand still, and I'll teach them a lesson."

What could I do?

I seized his arm, expecting that he would attempt to strike me a blow with the rifle butt.

"*Señor* Barlow," I cried in a whisper. "do not shoot. It is not far now to the open flats near the *rio* where the pigs feed."

For a moment he glared at me, and *señor*, my hand slipped back to my bamboo bolo, there was such a look in his eyes. Then he gritted out another curse, and dropped his rifle to the crook of his arm.

"That's all that'll save them," he cried fiercely. "Come along then."

Of a truth the devil was in that brute! And yet, what a man to shoot. I felt within me that I wished I were in better company. And yet, too, I felt that no charging *baubui* would have a chance to rip my body into pieces.

So on we went.

The meadow land opened out sharply after we had made another two kilos, and I cautioned the paymaster that he must be on the watch now. For the sun had dropped behind the hills to the west, and the pig would be feeding in the soft earth where the meadow and the *bosque* met. Also they had ears that could hear the crawling of a python a hundred paces away, and compared to man the python makes but the sound of a fluttering moth.

Slowly, slowly, we crept along, leaving the trail now, and following the edge of this meadow. Twice we saw movement, and heard a scuttling through the brush. And each time the paymaster became like a statue, balanced; and the safety latch of his rifle dropped without a sound. Aye, he knew well the manner of the hunt. But each time was he disappointed—and I, too, if the truth must be told.

Then once he stopped short again, his head cocked to one side, listening. Slowly his head swung about to me, while his body remained, one foot in advance.

Again he did this.

And this time he whispered to me.

"What was that?"

I shook my head.

"I heard nothing, *señor*," I replied.

His eyes bulged at me.

"Damn you, keep your ears clean! There's something behind us. Heard it twice."

I felt the blood rush to my head again. But it is not for nothing that I have my

reputation, *señor,* as I said before. One must keep cool under all conditions when one would live by the hunt. My hand was trembling toward the handle of my bolo, and I felt the itch to strike this Barlow—one clean stroke behind his fat red neck. But I did not. And perhaps it was the *buen Dios* that forbade. His is the vengeance, as I also said before. And truly are the priests who say that right. Of a truth they are.

We crept on.

We were in the country of the *baubui* now, *señor,* and I expected any instant to hear the sharp break of the paymaster's rifle. Yet I did not yet expect to see El Carnicero. He ruled the bottom lands of the Rio Boton, and his was the pick of the feeding grounds and the wallows. And there were two hours more before us before we would come to them.

Yet I thought: Let this Barlow shoot a little pig now, if he so desires. We can use but a little of it, yet the rest we can give to the Negrit's in their tiny village a kilo ahead on the trail. And thus the paymaster may turn the enmity of Chief Augustin into friendship, and perhaps we might get information that would lead more quickly to El Carnicero. It would be well for the paymaster to do this. The Negritos have strange customs, and still stranger thoughts. And besides they are the wildest of the wild, and not far from being more true creatures of the *bosque* than they are men. And when one is in the *bosque,* it is well to be friendly with all in the *bosque* —even with what one desires to hunt, *señor.*

Thus was I thinking, when of a suddenness more great even than before, did that paymaster freeze into a statue again.

He turned his head about, his rifle up and ready to drop level to shoot.

"There! Again!"

I, too, swung about, my weapon ready. And even as I turned, this Barlow's rifle dropped level, and his shot rang out.

I could not see what he was aiming at, but as the gun went off I heard a sharp crack as of two bones hitting quickly together, and saw something white go flashing off into the meadow. Then followed a great squeal of rage and pain, and immediately a crashing in the brush and bamboo of the *bosque.*

"Missed, by thunder!" snarled the paymaster, as I looked in surprise.

"But it was pig," I cried. "And of a truth I heard it squeal. And that something that went flashing off into the grass. I will look for it."

Though it was not very light in the valley now, the thing was not hard to find. A bit of white on the green mat of the turf. I bent to pick it up, then started back with a cry of astonishment.

"*Señor* Barlow! Look! Look!

I could not say more for the moment. I stood like that and stared, and pointed to the white object on the grass.

"By Heaven," cried the paymaster. "I did hit him after all. He'll feel the pain of it for a month, curse him. Here, give it to me."

But I could make no move. There were too many thoughts tangling up my brains just then. I could only stand there and point and stare.

"*Señor—señor*—it—must have been following us on the trail. You heard—twice before—you heard—"

I stopped. I was so bewildered; and, I must confess it, *señor,* I was almost frightened at what I saw.

The paymaster glared at me in that insolent way again.

"What the hell's the matter with you. Give me that—"

"*Señor,*" I cried. "You do not understand. The pig you shot at must have been following us — *following* us, *señor.* And this tusk that you shot off, this great sharp tusk—it can belong to but one *baubui* in all the Boton. Ah, *señor,* we must have a care now how we hunt. You have broken off one of the tusks of El Carnicero."

For a moment he glared. Then a strange look came into his eyes. The butt of his rifle thudded to the earth, and he stooped and examined the broken tusk without touching it.

"Twice I heard him—twice—" he began. Then broke off with a grunted curse. "Nosense! Nonsense! These damn blacks are too cursed superstitious. Puh!"

And he reached out and picked up the tusk. "You are sure that this is one of the tusks of El Carnicero?" he demanded.

"Look how great it is, *señor*," I cried. "There is but one king *baubui* in all the Boton that carried such tusks. There is but one who could so deeply slash Chief Augustin's son as you saw. Of truth it is from the jaws of El Carnicero."

He stared at the thing as though deep in thought.

Then he shrugged his shoulders, and thrust the broken tusk into his pocket.

"Then I have part of this pig devil of yours. And, by Heaven, I'll get the rest of him. I'll carry it on every hunt, and it will give me good luck. I'll need the pair of them. I'll show those—" And he broke off into a stream of most blasphemous words, in which I made out the name of Lieutenant Douglas, who had first dared him to kill El Carnicero; and also the name of Chief Augustin whom he now hated because he spoiled the poker game in which he had not won as usual. Aye, what a brute! Then he suddenly turned to me. "Where do we camp for the night?"

I told him that we must first cross the meadow, and enter the *bosque* again, and that with a quickness we would come to a good place.

He did not speak any more from that time until he rolled his blanket and rubber poncho about him. And then I heard him mutter, as though in his sleep:

"Following us, by heaven! I'll get him —I'll— I wonder—why—following us—me—"

And then he began to move about restlessly. But he spoke no more.

And I too, as I piled up bamboo for the fire that would make the ground at our feet warm through the cold of the river-bottom night, wondered much. That the tusk this Barlow had shot off was none other than one of El Carnicero's, I had no doubt. But had that devil pig been following us? And if so, why?

III.

Of a truth was that El Carnicero inhabited by the evil one.

With the first gray of the new morning did we arise, I to make coffee and boil water for the canteens loaned by Lieutenant Douglas of the destroyer, this Barlow to rub his eyes and sit unwashed, handling the broken tusk and bringing down the maledictions of all things that are good with his foul cursing that came muttering to me above the rushing of the stream.

Half an hour later, the breakfast was finished. And I wetted down the fire and repacked, and we made for the hunt.

But in that were we disappointed. Not a *baubui* did we see, or even hear. It would seem that the maiming of the king of the Boton *baubui* had become a news to the whole of his kind, and they lay hidden in the *bosque* in fear.

Yet to me it seemed that the fear should not so much lay with them as with us. This I cannot explain, *señor*, but as I say it so it was There was a something in the air, a feel, that I cannot put into words. You have felt days, *señor*, when your ship was lying in Canacao Bay near the yard at Cavit', when though there was nothing visible to fear, yet was there a something in the atmosphere that bade you wait—wait for something that was just behind the horizon, and coming, coming, coming, and coming not for good. A stillness in the air, a brooding of all things, when even the mosquitoes were not humming about your ears, and when the fishermen whose *bancas* were tied to the propeller guards at your stern fetched up not a single fish, but only those things of evil, long and brown with markings of poison yellow, and cruel little black eyes, the deadly *ajas tubig*.

Aye, well you know. And thus it was on this morning. Nothing to greet the ear, the very monkeys being silent. Nothing to greet the eye, the very leaves of the bamboo drooping as though in fearsome waiting. Only this—this feel, *señor*.

And what foulness did this paymaster say! I looked to see the *buen Dios* strike him dead at any moment. But this He did not, awaiting Himself perhaps for the moment when His vengeance could be more suiting and complete.

At last we made for the tiny group of huts that was the village of Chief Augustin.

And there another surprise met us—a surprise almost as great as when we found that the paymaster had indeed shot off the tusk of El Carnicero.

The village was one great outcry, as in mourning for the dead. And in truth so it was.

We were told to go to the shack of the chief, and he would tell us all. And when we arrived there, who should we find stricken dead but that chief's favorite wife, a girl who was half Negrit' and half your American negro, *señor,* whom the chief had brought over the mountains from a village near Camp Stotsenburg where the negro cavalry regiment was stationed. And great was the chief's grief, for by her had he hoped to raise a tribe of greater men and bolder hunters, because of that African blood, you see. And now—she was dead.

The little Negrit' lifted the rag with which he had covered her, American fashion, to keep away the flies, and then we saw what had taken away her life. A great gash down the left leg, *señor;* then another, deep and red, that had torn her right breast and penetrated deeply to the heart after she had fallen. Such a stroke! With the instant thought coming to me I raised my eyes to the Chief's, and found my answer and my heart was sick for him.

"El Carnicero!" I muttered. "Why did he come here? And—" Another thought: "When was this thing of evil done, chief?" I asked.

And he answered that it was at the hour of dawn this very morning.

And I put what he said into your tongue, *señor,* in order that that paymaster, standing there puffing a cigarette, might understand.

And I wondered much that he should so start when I told him. And his cigarette dropped from his fingers. For of a truth, and I must tell it, *señor,* that paymaster was no *cobarde,* but a bold man, though an evil one.

Then he cleared his throat, and spoke. "Ask him about the tusk."

And this I did, wondering why I had not thought of such a question myself. For much would depend upon the answer. For proof, *señor.*

"Aye," groaned the chief. "Surely that king *baubui* was making vengeance upon us for what has happened to him. For his right tusk was gone as by magic, and it was with the left that this was done." And he pointed to his dead favorite.

Whereupon I told this to Barlow, and he stiffened like a statue again, and with trembling fingers took out the tusk that he had shot off the night before, and held it up that Chief Augustin might see.

And with that the chief gave a terrible cry, and made as though to tear it from that paymaster's hand. But the paymaster drew back with a frown and a snarl.

"No," he muttered. "No. Tell him I keep it for a charm that I may soon match it with the tusk that killed his wife."

And when I had finished the chief also drew up stiffly, and a fire was in his eyes, and he spoke slowly and with awful meaning.

"Say to that cold hearted man of evil and death that he will regret the shot that broke off that tusk and brought my wife to this. Say that El Carnicero never forgets, and that he will hunt him until death comes, and even after death. Tell him that so long as he holds that tusk will he be safe, but that my people will pay for what he has done in death and more death and even more. Tell this man who mocked at my son's pain, and who has brought about my favorite's death, that we Negritos also do not forget, but that we will leave our vengeance in the hands of those things that are greater than man, but that that vengeance will surely come."

The paymaster interrupted.

"What in hell is that fool talking about?" he cried, as he shifted his weight to the other foot, and hitched his rifle in his arm.

Now I was not one to bring upon Chief Augustin the anger of this man of evil. And besides, did I quite love this man of evil myself? Of a truth, I leave the answer to that question to you. Had I not twice reached for the handle of my bolo back there on the trail?

And so I lied, and yet in lying said that which I felt would be best too for myself and my own skin, seeing that I was to spend the next few days with that pay-

master in the *bosque* hunting for this El Carnicero.

"He says that if you will give this tusk to his second wife she will sew it in a little leather bag, with a thong about it to hang from your neck. And that so long as you carry that tusk, you will be protected from the other great cutter that El Carnicero still carries."

The paymaster started slightly at this. And then he fell into thought. Then nodded quickly.

"So be it," he said. "But I will watch while she sews it in the leather."

And thus it was.

And crouched upon the earth beside the dead woman we watched the second wife and the chief as they sewed up that tusk into the leather bag. So quick they were, with their tiny childlike hands! And such a neatness in that job! Aye, steady were this Barlow's eyes upon the work, and steady were my own. And how, in their little voices like birds are these Negrit's, *señor,* did they chatter as they finished their task.

Then did that chief place the thong over the paymaster's head with his own hands, while the paymaster stiffened once more at the touch.

And I could not help but wonder, *señor,* if the paymaster was not thinking of how this El Carnicero had followed us on the trail the night before, and then after having lost his tusk, had rushed off into the bamboo, and then in the early morning done this cruel deed to Chief Augustin's wife. And I wondered myself if that great *baubui* had feared to attack us in the night because the paymaster had that broken tusk in his pocket.

And these Negrit's! Wild creatures of the *bosque* themselves! Did El Carnicero feel this? And was he taking a wicked vengeance upon them, because they were but half men and half wild creatures? And because it was this chief's own son who had really been the cause of the paymaster's coming to the Boton country, and causing him to lose this tusk which we had just seen sewn up in the deerskin bag that now hung from this Barlow's fat red neck?

The paymaster interrupted my thought.

"Snap out of it," he snarled to me in that way of his. "Let's get after him."

I threw out my hands, though the hot blood was rushing to my head again.

"He will be lying in the bamboo during the high sun, *señor,*" I protested. "Let us wait here in the village until evening time."

I cannot say to you what his answer was. As he desired, we sweated all day long through the *bosque.* And again was that strange feel in the air. And three times, five times, a dozen times, *señor,* did we hear something behind us in the bamboo. And yet, stopping and looking about us, could see nothing. And each time did that paymaster feel of the cord about his neck, and curse, and go purple in his fat face.

And secretly, *señor,* was I glad that the tusk was in that bag. For though I had seen this Barlow shoot, and shoot well, yet had that charm not been about his neck, I would still have feared. And with my reputation, *señor* that is to say something.

IV.

EVENING came, and still we saw nothing. Yet still, too, did we hear things behind us. And I could see that the paymaster did not like this.

Night came, and we returned to the village.

And again to find that El Carnicero had made a visit, and ripped the thigh of another woman who was getting water from the Boton.

And again did Chief Augustin beg the paymaster for that tusk, saying that he would give him many *pesos* for it. And he brought forth a tin can which was filled with money, *señor,* the money that all his people had received for many years by the sale of deer and pig and chicken to the navy folk at Gordon's and Olongapo. And though this Barlow's eyes looked upon these *pesos* with the greed that was part of his very soul, still he would not give up the leather bag.

So we lay in the open that night, by the *rio,* not caring to test out the vermin of the huts.

And the paymaster tossed much before

he slept; and when he did sleep, moaned and was not still. And about the mid of night, *señor,* he suddenly tangled up my brains with a loud cry.

"Something—somebody—!" he called out, looking about him, and with one hand upon the bag hanging from his neck, the other grasping his rifle.

"What was that, *señor?*" I asked.

"Damn you, why can't you keep awake! What are you here for anyway? Something—"

He felt his neck again, mumbling to himself.

And finally he lay down. And I thought him asleep again, and gone back to his restless dreams. Yet once again something awakened me, and there was that paymaster sitting up again, feeling of the bag that contained his tusk, and holding his rifle in the other hand. Aye, that did not make me feel any more comfortable, I tell you.

Was El Carnicero stalking us once more. I wondered. Or was it something else. And that tusk about this Barlow's neck. Was he so far gone as to believe in its power to keep off that great king *baubui?* There he was fumbling with the bag again.

"What is it, *señor?*" I ventured to ask again.

He glared at me. I could see the whites of his eyes reflected in the starlight from the smooth running Boton.

"Something—my neck—Curse you, have you no ears?"

I sat upon my pride again, and made as though to listen. And sure enough, from the village of Chief Augustin, came sounds of a drum. And also the wailing as of many children through the night.

"What are they making that infernal racket about?" snarled the paymaster.

And of a truth I could not say. For they were not singing the song of the dead. They were crying out for joy, and the song of the hunt, and of the fruitful conception, and of the happiness of the living. And this I could not understand.

Dawn came at last.

We passed through the village, and again I could not understand. For once more were the Negrito folk in mourning. And Chief Augustin squatted before the door of his hut, bleary of the eyes, and returned but a grunt and a nod as I gave him *buenas Dios* in his own twittering tongue.

"Let the filthy wretch alone, can't you!" cried that paymaster. "By the eternal I'll get that damn beast to-day."

Yet all that morning, and during the heat of the noon was our search in vain.

Yet, too, all the day did we hear strange rustlings behind us, and once, I swear it in the name of the martyr Jose Rizal than whom no man was greater, I heard the swift pattering feet and sudden snort of a pig. And that pig, again and by the same name do I swear it, was none other than El Carnicero.

Aye, he was a watchful one, and bided his own time. And as I said in the beginning, *señor,* what a cunning mind he had in that narrow head of his.

In the middle of the afternoon we made for the village again. It was the paymaster's plan to get one of the Negrit's to go out with us, hoping thereby that El Carnicero would make a charge, and thus enable him to make the kill.

And so it was that we stood in front of Chief Augustin, while I put into the Negrito tongue this Barlow's demand.

And I was but way through, when there came a sudden scream from the *rio,* and a woman came running, crying:

"El Carnicero. El Carnicero!"

The paymaster did not understand what she said, but he did hear the terrible snorting squeal that came from behind her, and he did see the great form of the king *baubui* rushing after.

His rifle was up in a flash, and a shot rang out.

And I looked to see the great one fall into a kicking heap, but he did not, and came rushing on. And the paymaster fired another shot—and still did he rush on.

And all this time I stood as in a dream, unable to lift my gun, unable to run. And, too, I was astonished that Chief Augustin still sat there on the earth before his hut, smoking his cigarette, calmly, with the burning end inside his mouth according to the Negrit custom, and watching the paymaster with a strange light in his eye. Of a truth,

I could not understand any more than I could move.

In a moment more I expected to see that great tusk rip open the flying woman. But, look you, *señor*, El Carnicero passed her by without another snort, and straight upon the paymaster he rushed.

And this Barlow shot again, and by another marvel he missed again; and look you, *señor*, I had seen him cut a chicken's throat at fifty steps, his only target being the red of its comb behind the clump of bamboo root.

And with that miss, he gave a great curse, and snatched the bolo from my belt, and rushed to meet El Carnicero.

"By the holies," he cried, "the gun's bewitched. I'll kill the ——. I'll rip him up as he would rip me. Fight him with his own weapons, by Heaven!"

And with a great leap the two met.

Aye, it was terrible, that fight.

Like a statue of stone I stood through it all. My arms were like stone, too, and I could not have raised my rifle had I thought of it. And perhaps it was well that I did not, for I was as likely to hit the paymaster as to kill El Carnicero.

And through it all Chief Augustin sat there quietly on the earth, with the smoke from his cigarette drifting from his nostrils, watching, watching, watching, with that strange glitter in his eyes.

Aye, I can see now that what was in his eyes was the knowledge of triumph, and that he, with the aid of *el buen Dios*, was being avenged. Yet I did not understand then. All his people now stood about, watching the man who was not a man, and the pig who was half devil, in their great fight. And none showed fear.

Then came a great curse, and I saw that paymaster fall to the ground, the red blood flowing from his leg, and with one hand pressing against his stomach, where I could see his shirt was ripped open, and quickly becoming red, too.

And El Carnicero was running in circles, with my great bamboo *bolo* that the paymaster had snatched from my belt, deep stuck in his neck. Aye, I tell you, *señor*, it was a sight to make men fear. Yet somehow I felt that it was well.

Yet I wondered. I wondered why it was that the paymaster had missed his shots. I wondered why El Carnicero had passed the woman by, and rushed straight upon him.

A moment more and it was all over.

El Carnicero, blinded by blood, and squealing with pain and rage, stumbled over this paymaster, and stumbling, could not arise. And that paymaster, with a last curse, seized upon the handle of the bolo. And thus they died. Yes, *señor*, they both died. And that El Carnicero had revenge, and that Barlow had his other tusk. But that did him no good.

Yet I wondered.

But that wonder ceased when the struggle was over, and I found I could move again. I glanced at Chief Augustin. And then I knew. For about his neck was a cord, and from the cord hung a great tusk that I thought, aye, I *knew*, I recognized.

And I quickly ran to the body of that man of evil and took the leather case from his neck and tore it open.

And instead of the broken tusk of El Carnicero being inside it, there was nothing but a piece of *narra* wood, carved to the same size.

Aye, they are quick with their fingers, are those Negrits. I could see now how it was that the paymaster was awakened during the night. Quick they are, and more wild things of the *bosque* than men.

But how El Carnicero knew that the change had been made, that, *señor*, I cannot tell, for I do not know. I can just say what I said in the beginning: that this El Carnicero was a great one, great in body, and with the eye of a fiend, the memory of a money lender, and the cunning of a fox. And I know, now that I have finished, that you, too, will never again say that these creatures of the *bosque* go only by this what you call instinct, and that they have no such thing in them as hate and fear and courage and memory and a thirst for revenge. For to say that would not be of the truth, and it is of true happening, *señor*, I swear it again by the name of Jose Rizal, of the most true happening, that I speak.

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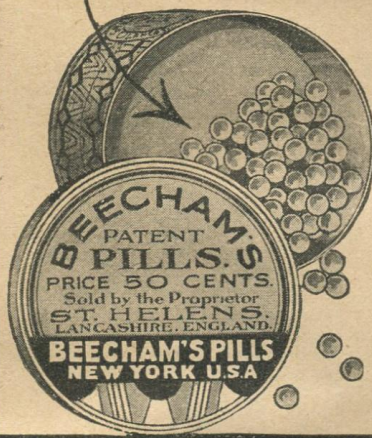

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A Re-built Man

I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

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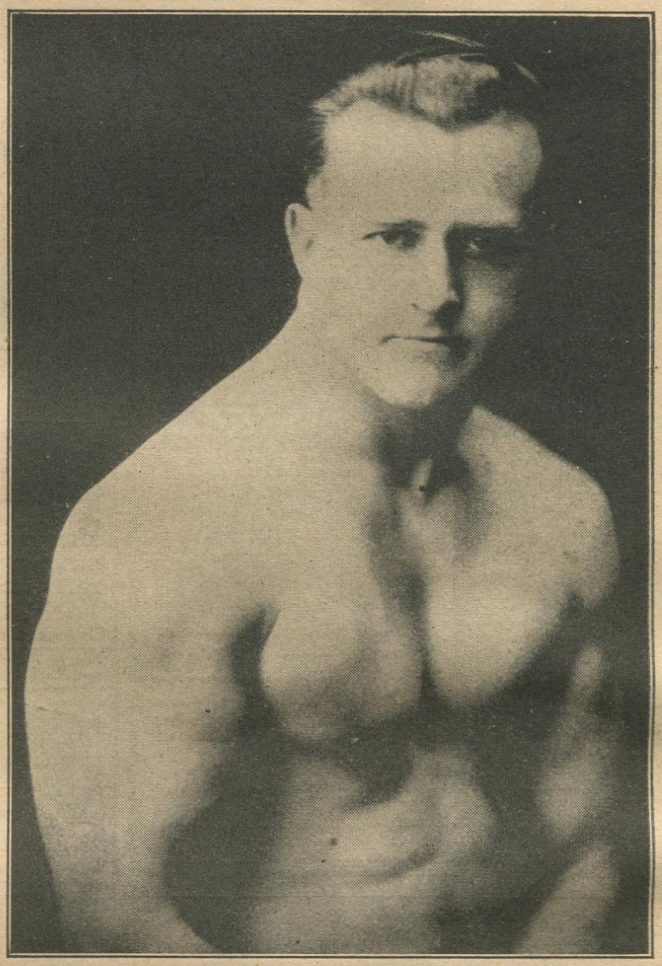

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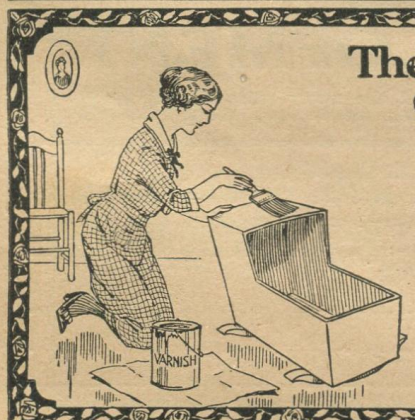

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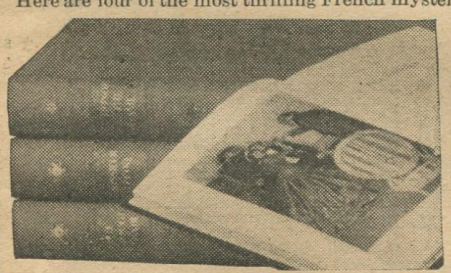

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Gentlemen: I enclose $12 for a Stein-O-Lite with the understanding that should it prove unsatisfactory after 5-days trial I can return it—and my money refunded.

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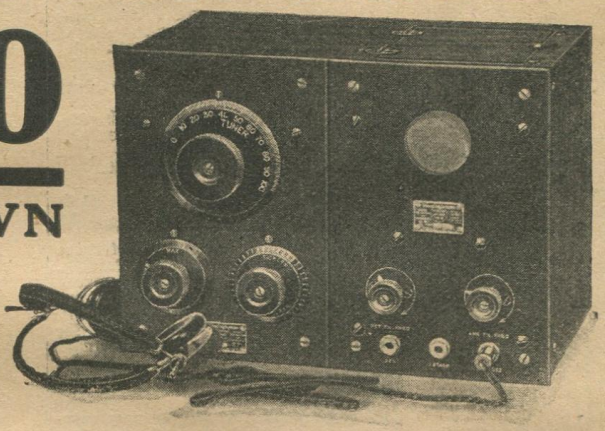

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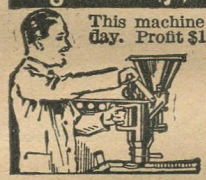

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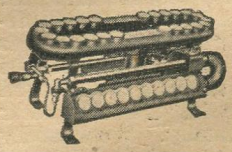

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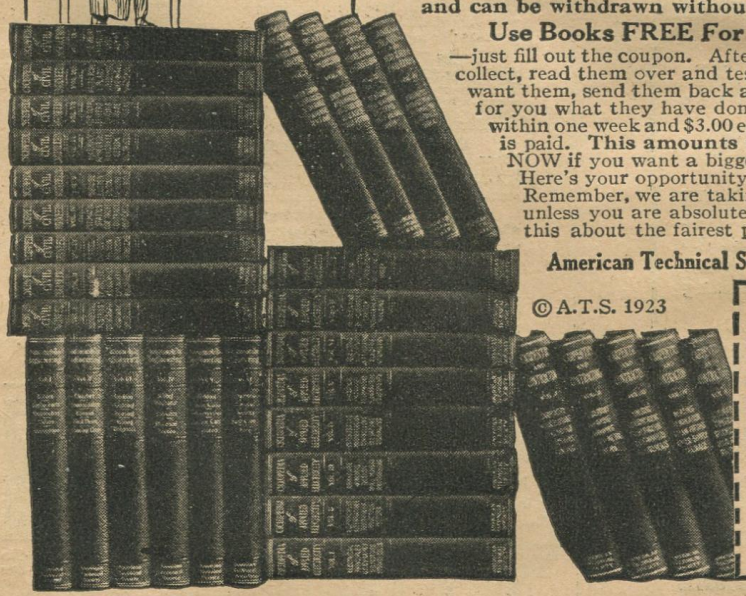

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The Oliver Oil-Gas Burner does away with coal and wood. Burns 95% air—5% oil. Turns any range, furnace or stove into a gas stove. 16 different models. Burns kerosene (coal oil). Gives much or little heat by simply turning valve. Think of the appeal you can make in every community. Solves fuel problem. Cheaper than coal, wood or gas—absolutely safe. Does away with drudgery—no fires to make, no ashes, dirt, smoke, chopping, carrying coal and wood. Easy to install. Doesn't change stove. Protects health. Easy to demonstrate—slips in or out of stove in one minute. Show any woman what it will do right in her own home and sale is made. Big demand all year. Let the fuel shortage make you big money.

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IN my lifetime I have heard many men speak of opportunity. I have read some very fine definitions of this wonder-word. It has been the subject of many splendid speeches; authors have written abundantly about it in prose and poetry.

You have said, "I wish I had an opportunity."

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The biggest opportunity that can ever come to you will never be any bigger than your preparation—your worth-whileness.

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—*if* you had been prepared.

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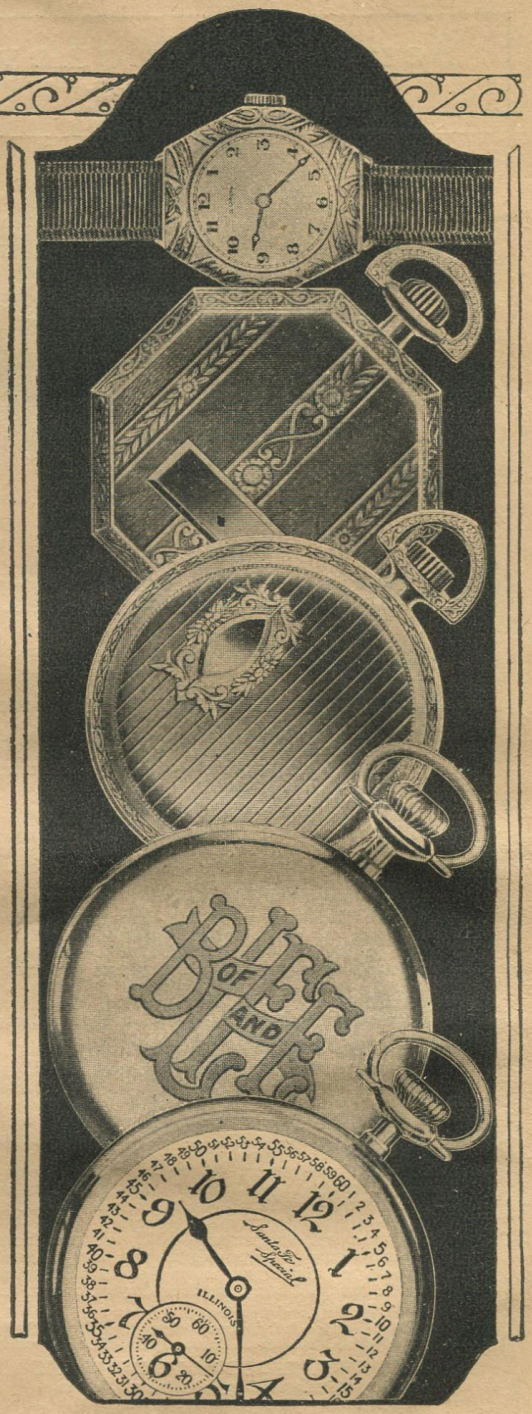

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Page 12 of Our Watch Book Is of Special Interest to You!

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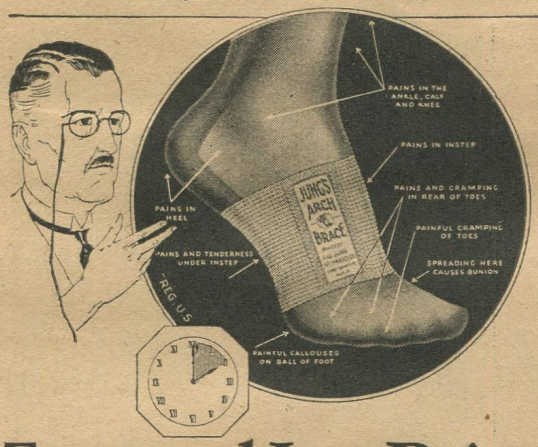
Send No Money

Just mail the coupon below with your foot measurement



Foot and Leg Pains Go in 10 Minutes

This New Way Absolutely Guaranteed

We guarantee to stop any foot or leg pains, due to arch weakness, in 10 minutes. Costs you nothing if we fail. This offers you a test without risk or obligation.

New Scientific Principles

Science discovered the cause of weak arches. A group of muscles, in the front of the foot, weakened by strain, cause nine out of ten cases of tired, aching or burning feet.

After five years of experimenting we found the way to take the strain off this group of muscles with a light, super-elastic bandage-like brace. You wear it, and like magic, the pains vanish.

No more metal plates, stiff arch props, or bunglesome pads. Just a little band of webbing that slips on and off as easily as a garter. The secret is in the tension and stretch; contour and design.

No More Tired, Aching Feet

If you have pains in the toes, instep, arch, heel or ankle; aches in calf, knee or thigh, cramped toes, callouses or other ills caused by weak arches, try a Jung Arch Brace. Go to your shoe dealer, druggist or chiropodist and be fitted. If he hasn't them write to us.

With a strip of paper, ½ inch wide, measure around the smallest part of the instep, just back of the toe joints, where the forward end of the brace is shown in illustration above.

Mail us this measurement and coupon below. When you receive the package pay the postman $1 and postage. Or if you send $1 we will prepay postage. If not relieved in ten days your money back. You assume no risk.

Ask for Free Book—Ask for our book on troubles of the feet and their correction. It is free. Illustrated with X-Ray views.

THE JUNG ARCH BRACE COMPANY
9103 Jung Building, Cincinnati, Ohio
If you live in Canada, address
Canadian Office—(Kirkham & Roberts, Mgrs.)
9103 Hamilton Trust Bldg., Toronto, Ont.
Canadian Price, $1.25

Send No Money

THE JUNG ARCH BRACE CO.
9103 Jung Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Please send me a pair of Jung Arch Braces. I enclose foot measurements. On receipt of package I will pay the postman $1 and postage, my money to be refunded if not satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

P. O.....State.....

I wear size.....shoe.....width or last

My dealer is.....

In treating sprains

It is important that the blood should be kept circulating freely through the injured part—otherwise it may be left permanently stiff and lame.

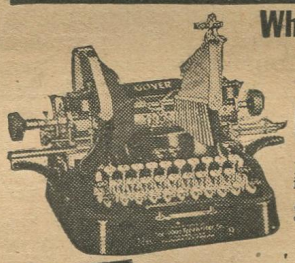
Apply Sloan's generously. No rubbing is necessary. It sends an increased blood supply straight to the spot. The throbbing ache is relieved, the swelling and inflammation reduced. Get a bottle of Sloan's today and have it on hand—35 cents at all druggists.

Sloan's Liniment *kills pain!*

SMASHING SALE
By Oliver Typewriter Co.

While They Last

1000 No. 9 Olivers



Rebuilt like new, right in Oliver Factory, only

$44.50

Save $50

Never before an offer like this, and probably never again! Only the great Oliver Company itself could do it. Famous Model No. 9 Oliver at the slashed price of only $44.50—and a year to pay! Genuine No. 9 Oliver with standard keyboard and all late improvements, rebuilt throughout like new right in our own factory. The equal—yes the superior, we say, of any $100 typewriter on the market. And yours for only $44.50 on this special sale of 1,000 machines.

Free Trial—A Year to Pay

Act quick before the 1,000 machines are gone. Try, however before you buy. We give you 5 days free trial. Return or keep the Oliver as you decide. No cost to you whatever for the free trial. A year to pay if you buy. Write today for full particulars of this sale. Mail coupon or postal.

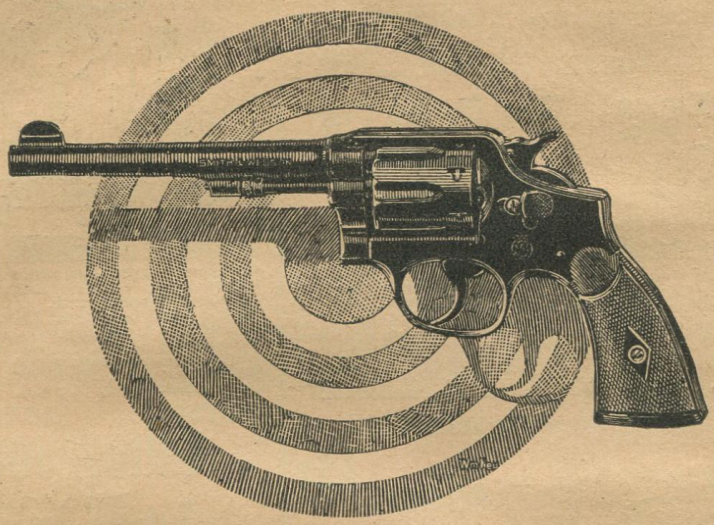
Oliver Typewriter Co. (*Rebuilt Machine Dept.*) **Oliver Typewriter Co., Chicago**

Oliver Typewriter Co., (*Rebuilt Machine Dept.*) **737 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago**

Please send me full particulars of your sensational sale of 1,000 No. 9 Olivers.

Name.....

Address.....



NO picture can show the qualities of accuracy, dependability and reliability which have built the Smith & Wesson reputation for superiority. Actual examination will convince you. Any dealer will gladly permit close scrutiny of any Smith & Wesson revolver.

SMITH & WESSON

Manufacturers of Superior Revolvers

SPRINGFIELD
MASSACHUSETTS

Catalogue sent on request. Address Department O

No arms are genuine Smith & Wesson Arms unless they bear, plainly marked on the barrel, the name

SMITH & WESSON, SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Western Representatives

Andrew Carrigan Company, Rialto Bldg., San Francisco, Cal.
Los Angeles, Cal., Seattle, Wash.

LUMINOUS PAINT

Make Your Watches, Clocks, Etc., Visible by Night

The very latest discovery in the scientific world. Hitherto, practically unobtainable except at an exorbitant price, we have at last succeeded in producing this remarkable LUMINOUS PAINT, which, applied to the surface of any article, **emits rays of white light, rendering it eprfectly visible** in the dark. **THE DARKER THE NIGHT, THE MORE BRILLIANT IT SHINES.** Quite simple to use. Anyone—you can do it. A little applied to the dial of your watch or clock will enable you to tell the time by night. You can coat the push buttons or switch plates of your electric lights, match boxes, and innumerable other articles; make your own Luminous Crucifixes, Luminous Rosaries, etc. Small bottle, **price 25c.** Larger sizes, **50c** and **$1** postpaid.

Serpent's Eggs

Box contains 12 eggs. When lit with a match, each one gradually hatches itself into a snake several feet long, which curls and twists about in a most life-like manner. **Price per box, 10c postpaid. 3 for 25c.**

Potmend

Mends Ironware, Agate-ware, kettles, pots pans, boilers, tin, copper, aluminum, ice boxes, iron pipes, cracks in stoves, broken china, porcelain, bric-a-brac, bisque, crockery, woodenware, marble, etc. Comes in powdered form. Just mix with water and apply. HARDENS LIKE IRON. Mends a big hole or a small crack. PRICE **15c, 3** for **40c**, postpaid.

Midget Bible

GREAT CURIOSITY Smallest Bible in the World. Size of a postage stamp. **200 Pages.** Said to bring good luck to the owner. A genuine work of art. Must be seen to be appreciated. Make good money selling them to friends, church acquaintances, etc. PRICE **15c** each, **3** for **40c, 12** for **$1.35, 100** for **$7.50.**

STAGE MONEY

With a bunch of these bills, it is easy for each person of limited means to appear prosperous by flashing a roll of these bills at the proper time and peeling off a genuine bill or two from the outside of the roll, the effect created will be found to be all that can be desired. **Prices, postpaid: 15 Bills 10c, 50 Bills 25c, 125 for 50c, or $3.50 thousand.**

Wonderful X-Ray Tube

A wonderful little instrument producing optical illusions both surprising and startling. With it you can see what is apparently the bones of your fingers, the lead in a lead pencil, the interior opening in a pipe stem, and many other similar illusions. A mystery that no one has been able to satisfactorily explain. Price **10c, 3** for **25c, 1** dozen **75c. Johnson Smith & Co.**

Good Luck Ring

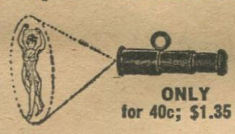
Quaint and Novel Design

A VERY striking and uncommon ring. Silver finish, skull and crossbone design, with two brilliant, flashing gems sparkling out of the eyes. Said by many to bring Good Luck to the wearer, hence its name, **Good Luck Ring.** Very unique ring that you will take a pride in wearing. **ONLY 25 CENTS.**

The Dying Pig

The most laughable novelty yet produced. Made of rubber, and you have only to blow it up and stand the pig on his feet, when he begins to squeal as he slowly collapses and finally lies down and dies in the most natural manner. You can blow him up as often as desired, and each time he will go through the same performance to the great amusement and delight of your friends. Price, **15** cents; **3** for **40** cents; one dozen **$1.35,** mailed.

Popular Watch Charms



15c

ONLY for 40c; $1.35 doz.

Very pretty little curiosities and decidedly novel. Fitted with Magnifying Lenses that enlarge the pictures to a very surprising degree; in fact, it seems almost incredible that a clear picture could be possible in such a small compass, and how sharp and distinct they show up when you look through. Come in assorted views—Actresses, views of Panama Canal, Lord's Prayer in type, etc.

Mystic Skeleton

A jointed figure of a skeleton 14 in. in height, will dance to music and perform various gyrations and movements while the operator may be some distance from it.

10c pd.

NEW BOOK ON ROPE SPLICING

Useful Knots, Hitches, Splices, etc.

A most practical handbook giving complete and simple directions for making all the most useful knots, hitches, rigging, splices, etc. Over 100 illustrations. All about wire rope attachments, lashing, blocks, tackles, etc. 37 Heraldic Knots illustrated. Of great value to mechanics, riggers, campers, boatmen. **Price 20c ppd.**

MAGIC FLUTE

Wonderfully Sweet Toned and Musical

Post Paid 25c

The Magic Flute, or Humanatone, is a unique and novel musical instrument that is played with nose and mouth combined. There is just a little knack in playing it which, when once acquired after a little practice will enable you to produce very sweet music that somewhat resembles a flute. There is no fingering, and once you have mastered it you can play all kinds of music with facility and ease. When played as an accompaniment to a piano or any other musical instrument, the effect is as charming as it is surprising.

Address orders for all goods on this page to

JOHNSON SMITH & CO.

Dept. 8 RACINE, WIS.

Our large catalog (356 Pages) of all the newest and best novelties, unobtainable elsewhere, free with every order.

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL

Protection against Burglars, Tramps & Dogs

Prices 50c $1.00 Postpaid

Well made and effective; modelled on latest type of Revolver; appearance alone is enough to scare a burglar. When loaded it may be as effective as a real revolver without danger to life. It takes standard .22 Cal. Blank Cartridges obtainable everywhere. **Price 50c, superior quality, $1.00 postpaid. Blank Cartridges,** by express. **50c** per **100.**

Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 8, Racine, Wis.

DANCING BEAUTIES

BEST EVER

Get a Kinemetograph and see the picture move. France's latest sensation. A great surprise. Is worth twice what they cost. Are made of solid brass, highly nickled and very durable. Satisfactory or your money back. Don't show your girl. Price **50c**

Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 8, Racine, Wis.

BOYS! BOYS! BOYS!

THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling the teacher, policeman or friends.

THE VENTRILO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it.

Never Fails. A 32 page book on ventriloquism, the Ventrillo, ALL FOR 10 CENTS

1000 Silk Remnants

for patching Crazy Quilts, Sofa Cushions, Head Rests, Pin Pads etc. Large pieces, all colors and shades. Sure to delight you.

For 10 Cents stamps, we send a large package and Book of quilt designs. 3 packages 25c. 1 pound makes a lovely large quilt. Price 75c postpaid. Our silk is the best.

JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 8, RACINE, WIS.

LOOK 50¢ Look

Wonderful Instrument. Greatest thing yet. Nine separate articles in one. Everybody delighted with it. Odd, curious and interesting. Lots of pleasure as well as very useful. It is a double Microscope for examining the wonders of nature. It is also an Opera Glass, a Stereoscope, a Burning Lens, a Reading Glass, a Telescope, a Compass, a Pocket Mirror, and a Laryngascope—for examining eye, ear, nose and throat. It is worth all the cost to locate even one painful cinder in the eye. Folds flat and fits the pocket. Something great—you need one. Don't miss it. Sent by mail, with 356 page Novelty Catalog. **Only 50c or 3 for $1.25**

With Illustrated Directions

3 for $1.25

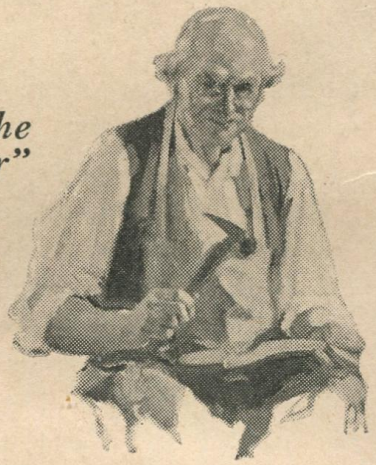
Resurrection Plant

One of the most wonderful plants known. Possesses the strange power of turning in a few minutes from an apparently lifeless, dry herb to a **BEAUTIFUL LIVING FERNLIKE PLANT** of a dark green color. Simply place the plant in saucer of water, it will open up and start to grow in 20 minutes. When taken out it will dry up and go to sleep until placed in water again. Fine house plant—summer or winter. **10 cents each** or 3 for 25c, post paid. **AGENTS WANTED**

JOHNSON SMITH & CO., Dept. 8, RACINE, WIS.

Write that Prize-winning Letter NOW!

"Nothing Takes the Place of Leather"



Rules of the Contest

1—Letters must be written in the English language, and on only one side of the paper.

2—The competitor's name and address must be written at the top of the first page of the letter.

3—The letter must be mailed in a sealed, stamped envelope. *No post cards will be considered.*

4—There shall be no limits to the length a letter may be; and any competitor may send in as many letters as desired.

5—This Contest shall be freely open to anyone, anywhere.

6—The first prize will be awarded to the contestant whose letter on the subject, "Nothing Takes the Place of Leather," is the best in the opinion of the judges.

7—The Contest opens officially June 30, 1923, and closes October 31, 1923.

8—In case of tie, both or all tying contestants will receive the full amount of the prize tied for.

Five Thousand Dollars in Cash Prizes

for Letters about Leather,

but your letter must be written by October 31, 1923

ALL letters must be written not later than October 31. Sit down and write your letter now

What could be simpler—or more profitable—than writing a Letter about Leather. Start with what you have found out about good leather in your every-day life.

Comfort! How easy your feet feel with sturdy, damp-proof, slip-proof leather soles and heels to trudge solidly upon!

Economy, if you have a practical mind. Think what wear you get out of shoes soled and heeled with tough, resistant leather. It's easy to repair as no other substance is. Then think how little a part of the price of such shoes even the best sole leather represents!

Does fashion in footwear appeal most to you? Consider how the lightest leather sole holds the upper in shape, provides the foundation which, alone, keeps handsome shoes good-looking and style-fresh.

The healthful qualities inherent in sole leather would make an ideal theme for a prize-winning Letter about Leather. Your feet breathe through leather soles. Leather is porous. It allows the excess heat to escape. That is not the case with other materials, often used for soles.

Durability under trying conditions? Postmen, policemen, soldiers and all the workers of all the world know "nothing takes the place of leather" for honest, downright endurance. Its millions of tough, springy fibres defy the grind as nothing else will do.

What is true of leather soles and heels is just as true, and more spectacular, of leather belting. Through thousands of hours, leather belts speed on in factories and shops. Men who work at many a trade know this value of leather. Some of these men are writing Letters about Leather that will be richly rewarded. Why not you?

JUDGES

MARTHA E. DODSON, *Associate Editor, The Ladies' Home Journal*
PRESIDENT FREDERICK C. HICKS *of the University of Cincinnati*
PRESIDENT FRASER M. MOFFAT *of the Tanners' Council*

Address your letter to Contest Judges

AMERICAN SOLE *and* BELTING LEATHER TANNERS
17 Battery Place, New York City

FREE! Hearth Rug FREE WITH 9×12 FT. Seamless Brussels Rug

$1 30 Days' Free Trial

I want this rug to be its own salesman. I want to send it to you on 30 Days' Free Trial to use as your own at My Risk. If your satisfaction is not complete—or if for any reason in the world you wish to do so—you may return the rug after a whole month's use. The trial will not cost you a penny. I will refund your first payment and all freight charges. Sign the coupon, send it and $1. The rug will soon be on its way to you.

With Order

SPECIAL 30th ANNIVERSARY

Sale Price Only $29.95

Easy Monthly Payments

The former price of this Fine Rug was $42.95—and without the Free Hearth Rug of course. Now that I have Slashed $13.00 from the price and am including The Free Hearth Rug besides, this offer is a Tremendous Bargain. **Size:** Full Room Size, 9 x 12 ft. only. **Material and Quality:** Brussels of a very good grade. High quality wool worsted face, with heavy back. The worsted yarns are carefully selected, tightly twisted, and woven in the well known desirable Brussels loop style. Made in one piece and without a single seam. A rich-looking rug that will give many years of service. **Design:** A floral pattern, dainty, yet distinctive. The handsome center medallion is made more beautiful by the rose clusters surrounding it. Then there is the exquisite gold scroll and floral field, all enclosed in a rich border. Colors: Tans, Browns, Green, Taupe, Red and Gold. There are several shades of these colors. Light Tans running in the rich deep Browns and Handsome Gold Scrolls predominate. These colors are guaranteed to be absolutely Fast and Will Not run or fade. This is a rug for any room in the house. It will harmonize with any kind of furniture. Former price $42.95. Order No. RA5015. Price $29.95. Terms $1 with order; balance $2.50 Monthly.

"I Will Trust You Gladly"
Spear of Pittsburgh

Samuel Spear, President

SPEAR & CO.

DEPARTMENT W-2 PITTSBURGH, PA.

Home Furnishers for the People of America

THE FREE HEARTH RUG

This 26 x 52 inch Brussels Hearth Rug is of the same quality, the same materials, and the same colorings as the 9 x 12 ft. room rug described on this page. It matches the big rug exactly. When used in the same room, the two will harmonize perfectly. This Free Hearth Rug is a Prize to the Prompt. To get it you must send in your order promptly. Both rugs will be sent together. Send in your order today.

30th ANNIVERSARY SALE

Thirty years ago this business made its humble beginning. With great faith I staked my all on the downright honesty of the average man and woman. I was a pioneer in the "open account way" of home furnishing. My little business has since grown into a mammoth institution that performs a nationwide service. To celebrate my thirtieth anniversary I am conducting a Big Sale that will last throughout the year.

BIG FREE BOOK

All my prices are low — much lower than Spot Cash Prices in your home town stores. Everything I sell is sent on 30 Days' Free Trial and Use in Your Own Home, and I give the Longest Time to Pay. Send for my Big Free Catalog today. Learn how easy it is to get now the things you have long yearned for.

Guaranteed Savings of 30 to 50% on Furniture, Bedding, Springs, Mattresses, Bed Spreads, Rugs, Carpets, Linoleum, Portieres, Dishes, Stoves, Lace Curtains, Ranges, Refrigerators, Glassware, Clocks, Aluminum Ware, Baby Carriages, Enamel Cooking Sets, Washing Machines, Sewing Machines, Lamps, Table Linen, Silverware, Phonographs, Cameras, Children's Automobiles and Wagons, Bicycles, Guns, etc.

Spear & Co., Dept. W-2, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once 9 x 12 ft. Rug and FREE Hearth Rug as described above. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $2.50 monthly. Order No. RA5015. Price $29.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.

Name..... Occupation.....

R. F. D., Box No. or Street and No.....

Post Office..... State.....

If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in line below

Send Shipment to.....

FREE CATALOG ☐ If you want the Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put an X here ☐ and write your name and address plainly on the above lines